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PART II.

THE TREASURE IN THE VAULTS.

XII.

THE young folk of now-a-days can have but an idea of the singular sight which, in those times, was daily and gratuitously witnessed in the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau. From the narrow courtyard of the Hôtel des Postes, at six in the evening, strange vehicles drawn by five horses emerged, dashing off at full speed. The passers-by hastily darted out of the way ; the vehicles turned with a precision which proved the drivers' skill, the whips snapped gaily, the lamps glared like meteors, and then all suddenly vanished round a corner. These mail-coaches which thus set out towards the channel, the ocean, the Pyrenees, the Mediterranean, and the Rhine, were at their best under Louis Philippe, but few years, that is to say, before they were superseded by railroads.

After long indecision, an odd model had been adopted, which was very inconvenient for the courier. That responsible functionary was relegated to a high perch at the back of the coach, almost like a hansom cab-driver, but with the difference that he did not hold the reins, which were in the hands of a man on the box. The courier only held communication with the passengers on leaving or arriving, or at times when horses were changed. It was at the departure that the most chatting occurred, for the people bound for some three, or perhaps six hundred miles away, on board this vessel on wheels, of which he was the captain, tried to gain his good graces by addressing a few familiar words to him. This incident even formed a picture which would have served as a fit pendant to the scene of the departure from the courtyard. The courier, serious and almost solemn, would call out two or four names, according as the mail-coach was a "britzka" or a "berline," and the travellers whose names were thus shouted, left the various groups of people waiting. The scene vaguely resembled the summoning of the condemned under the Reign of Terror. Farewells, and at times even tears, were not wanting.

However, in 1821, the mail was carried much in the same way as had been prevalent under the Directory. The letters were enclosed in a long, wide box in front of which there was a kind of gig on four wheels, as badly hung as a waggon. The courier sat in an open compartment, and the

postillion rode one of the polc horses. A counterpart of the vehicle may be seen on the stage, whenever the famous play called "The Courier of Lyons" is performed. There was only room for one person beside the courier, and the unfortunate beings, whom urgent business forced to take the mail-coach, ran the risk of reaching their destination frozen, or at least fagged out. They had no protection from the cold, the wind, or the rain, and the roads were so bad that they were horribly jolted.

They also were exposed to be despoiled and ill-treated by highway robbers. The old bands which had infested the roads under the Consulate had again formed, and plied their calling with unparalleled audacity, in the very environs of Paris. The Brest coach had been attacked by men, armed with guns, and robbed near Pont-Chartrain. The Strasburg coach had been stopped at Bondy; the Chartres coach had been pillaged between Versailles and Saint-Cyr. And these acts of brigandage were not near ceasing, for those who committed them were only brought to punishment in March, 1825. Consequently, some courage was required to travel by the public coaches, and many people made their wills before starting. In going by the mail-coaches especially, travellers armed themselves to the teeth, as though they had been starting on a campaign, for the robbers had a preference for the vehicles carrying valuables. However, people in a hurry preferred to travel by the mail, which went at the rate of eight miles an hour, while the diligence only travelled at the rate of six.

Now Count René was in a hurry to reach his destination when he made up his mind to go to Brouage at the end of May. He was not going there to sell the land, for he could not do so without his brother's authorisation, as the ownership of the estate, the salt marshes and the ruined castle was mutual. Now Fabien had refused to give his brother the necessary authorisation at a stormy interview which they had had together on the morrow of the meeting at Tivoli Gardens. Fabien had not hesitated to tell René his opinion of Octavie and Saint-Héliér, or to comment upon the attentions of the student Marcas, and his evil designs as regarded all who bore the name of Brouage.

René had been highly enraged by this outburst, and they had parted after almost a rupture. The hearts of lovers are so framed that the more the woman they love is attacked, the more they love her. The general's violence and threats had merely excited René; Fabien's accusations as regarded the golden-haired beauty exasperated him, and urged him to rush on and marry the woman from whom all his relatives tried to turn him. In his prejudiced mind, these accusations were simply slanders. He was willing to admit that the chevalier's family might not belong to the old nobility, or perhaps not even be noble at all. But he did not admit that Octavie had uttered a falsehood, when she had sworn to remain faithful to him, or that she had compromised herself with the student Marcas.

He had never met Marcas at the house on the Place Royale, for Octavie had kept her admirer out of his way; he had caught but a glimpse of him in the Tivoli gardens, and had taken such slight notice of the insignificant fellow that he would scarcely have recognised him had he met him again. During the evening walk, Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér had manœuvred with great skill, choosing the darkest paths, and keeping the student, whose imprudence she feared, at some distance.

René did not suspect her of being in league with the skinny Southerner, whose position in the chevalier's house was that of a subordinate, and his

pride revolted at the mere thought that such a man could be his rival. Thus Fabien had wounded him to the quick, and when the brothers parted, the elder had resolved to put an end to the sharing of the estate, and to appeal to the law, as his junior refused to come to terms by private agreement.

René had declared his intention to Fabien, who had paid but little heed to it, but he had not told him of his resolution to go to Brouage, and Fabien cared little for the lawsuit with which he was threatened, as money matters had little interest for him. After this rupture the count had hastily written to Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier that he was about to make the journey which had been planned, that he should start in a few days, that his absence would be of short duration, and that on his return he meant to ask for her hand in marriage. He allowed her to understand that his affairs would then be arranged, and it is almost needless to say, he did not allude to anything that Fabien had said.

He did not have long to wait for Octavie's reply. She sent him a note by her maid, a note containing these words: "Go. My heart goes with you. I shall impatiently look forward to your return, and I am yours."

At this, René determined to start at once. His journey had a double aim. He wished, in the first place, to see a notary at La Rochelle who had offered to lend him a considerable sum on a mortgage, and then after visiting his farm to repair to Marennnes, in order to select a lawyer to prosecute, at the local court, the suit on which he had determined. He wished to be back in Paris as soon as possible, and in those days it was no easy matter to travel twice three hundred and sixty miles.

René had no carriage, so he was obliged to have recourse either to the mail-coach or the diligence. The Messageries-Royales took two days and three nights to reach La Rochelle, while the mail-coach made the same trip in forty-eight hours. So he hastened to the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau and engaged his place for the 29th of May. Marcas had already left Paris on the 26th.

The count made use of the three days left him to apply to the minister, at whose office he worked, for leave of absence which was not very readily granted, for it was known that he had quarrelled with his uncle, and there was already less willingness to oblige him. He was forced to explain the reasons for his journey and state where he was going, and, strange to say, it was in this way that the high *venta* became aware of his intentions. The Carbonari had friends everywhere, even at the ministry of Foreign Affairs, and its leaders were always informed of everything that could interest the Association.

Orso, Prince of Catanzaro, was better able than any one else to find out what was going on at the minister's office; he was the first to learn that the Count de Brouage was about to visit his estates, and he immediately took measures to prevent him from reaching them. It was necessary to prevent any surprise which might imperil the treasure of the Carbonari, and the baroness who was mounting guard over it.

During the three days which the grandmaster of the Coral Pin Association turned to account in this manner, René was so entirely absorbed by cares of all kinds that he did not even take time to open his letters, and the communication from the English governess was in his pocket-book still sealed up like several other letters, when he took the coach at the Hôtel des Postes.

The hour at which the mail started did not coincide with that at which

the chevalier glided through the side streets on his way to the Dark Room, so that M. de Brouage ran no risk of meeting the man whose son-in-law he aspired to be. He got into the little gig beside the courier, who was a stout jolly fellow, greatly disposed to chat, and very obliging as regarded those who travelled with him. René did not turn his talkativeness to account, but he had reason to be grateful for his attentions, and congratulated himself on having decided to go by the mail-coach, for all went remarkably well at first.

The dangerous places where robbers most frequently appeared were passed without any mishap, and by daybreak they were beyond Chartres. They breakfasted at Châteaudun, and dined at Tours, where they made a capital meal which lasted no little time. The courier was fond of good cheer and did not care for a quarter of an hour more or less. The second night was spent by René in sleeping, and he scarcely noticed that they passed through Poitiers. He only awoke when they reached Niort to take the last meal of the trip, for they were due at La Rochelle at six in the evening.

At the fourth change of horses after leaving Niort, at a village called Surgères, the road parted, one part going to La Rochelle and the other to Rochefort. The mail-coach had been rattling along the road to La Rochelle for about half an hour, and was descending a steep hill, when the courier shouted to the postillion, who was going too fast: "You will upset us in a ditch, my lad, if you go on at this rate."

"No danger," answered the postillion, without turning round, and whipping his horses with all his might.

"The fellow's tipsy," said René.

"And he does not know his horses," added the courier. "I never saw him before. He must have been engaged by the postmaster yesterday. It isn't allowable for any one to drive like that. I shall complain to the officials on arriving. Hullo! Mind what you are about, you brute! Take care not to turn too short at the bottom of the hill."

"Don't be afraid," replied the postillion.

René was not afraid, but he felt quite sure that the coach would upset, and it did. After going down the hill at a break-neck pace, the ill-managed horses ran the right wheel against a pile of stones, and the vehicle was overturned with such great violence that M. de Brouage was thrown out of the gig almost under the feet of the horses which were furiously plunging about. He thought himself lost, but having the presence of mind not to move, he called out to the postillion, who was still in the saddle: "Come down and help me!"

The fellow with the boots was undoubtedly intoxicated, for he did not understand, and instead of obeying began to spur his steed. It was a miracle that the count's head was not crushed by the hoofs of the horses as they kicked and plunged about. Fortunately, the drunken man spurred the animal he rode so roughly that it broke its traces. The whole team followed suit and dashed away, dragging the harness and the swing-bar with them.

René, freed of his apprehensions, now rose up, and saw that the unfortunate courier lay prostrate upon the wayside. He ran towards him and tried to help him up, but the poor fellow had been kicked full in the chest, the blood was gushing from his mouth, and he gave no sign of life. René's rage found expression in a torrent of upbraiding words addressed to the postillion who had caused the catastrophe. The scoundrel had not dis-

mounted, but was looking with the expression of an idiot, both at the dead and the living man. Count de Brouage's reproofs now aroused him from his torpor, but did not induce him to offer any help. Instead of alighting, he dug his spurs into the sides of the animal he was riding, and galloped off in the direction of La Rochelle.

René, left to himself, was in a trying position. The accident had taken place at the foot of a hill, in a kind of cutting surrounded by heights. The road was deserted and the valley seemed uninhabited. There was no one near by to give assistance, and, as an additional misfortune, René, fatigued by the journey, had dozed off after the last stage, and did not know where he was. He listened in the hope of hearing the sound of cart wheels, or the footsteps of some wayfarer. But in those days the French highroads were less frequented than now. Public conveyances passed by but once in the day, and private carriages were seldom seen, there were but few carriers, and the peasants mostly cut through the fields. The Count de Brouage heard nothing but the chirp of the crickets excited by the warm spring weather, and the rustle of the elms stirred by the breeze from the distant sea.

To wait in the ravine till heaven sent him help was pure folly. It would surely be better to climb one of the slopes and walk till he found some passers-by or a cottage. The unfortunate courier had been killed on the spot. René made sure that this was the case, and thought it idle to remain beside a corpse, which was past all help. He took a cushion from the gig, placed it in one of the dry ditches at the roadside, took the dead man in his arms, and laid him on this novel couch. The coach, with its wheels in the air, was in an extremely bad condition; however the portion containing the mail was not broken. The count was not called upon to watch over the letters confided to the government, and did not trouble himself much as to the fate of his own baggage. He left the dead body and the coach and climbed to the top of the hill down which he had come in so disastrous a fashion. He rightly opined that he could not be far from the last stage, and was convinced of this when, on reaching the top of the hill, he saw a steeple, which he thought he recognised, at no great distance off. It was the steeple of the old church of Surgères, and as the crow flies he could not be more than half an hour's distance from the village, where he would, of course, find help.

He hastened on, and half way along the road he met two mounted gendarmes carrying letters, whom he told what had occurred, begging them to repair to the scene of the accident. The men listened to him, questioned him, and he had no difficulty in giving them satisfactory answers. When they learned who he was, they requested him to warn the postmaster at Surgères while they went on to verify his statements. The name of Brouage was well known in that part of the country, and the count's looks impressed them favourably. Had not this been the case, they might have kept him with them for a time at least.

He hurried on to Surgères, where he arrived in less than twenty-five minutes, although he had been badly bruised by his fall. The post was at the entrance of the village, and the postmaster kept an inn. René found him at the door, talking with a traveller of whom he caught but a glimpse, for at sight of René this individual darted into the house.

The innkeeper-and-postmaster was thrown into a state of extraordinary excitement by the narrative of the accident. He deplored it all the more as the general manager of the postal service might take his licence from

him ; he swore at mention of the rascally postillion who had got so abominably drunk, and at the scamps who had treated him to so much liquor ; he bewailed the sad fate of the courier, with whom he was acquainted—he had known him, he said, for ten years—but he did not do anything that the occasion called for, nor would he have done anything had not René reminded him that the authorities ought to be informed, and some people sent to help the gendarmes. This done, M. de Brouage gave his own name, and inquired what means there were of his starting at once for La Rochelle, for he was in a great hurry and wanted to make up for lost time.

The postmaster bowed to the very ground, asked him if he were related to M. de Brouage, the peer of France, and on receiving an affirmative reply, made any number of protestations of respect, and freely offered his services ; only he declared, at the same time, that René could not possibly start till the next day. The coach, which ran between Surgères and La Rochelle, started at seven in the morning ; the Paris diligence passed by at midnight, and was always full. As for such conveyances as belonged to him, the postmaster stated that they were all out upon the road, and would not be in for a couple of days. In a word, the count was condemned to pass the night at Surgères.

René at first thought that this was an innkeeper's trick to compel him to partake of his hostelry's hospitality ; but, when he had offered four times the value for a conveyance of any description, on springs or not, and the postmaster had refused the money, he realised that the man was sincere. However, he did not yet consider himself beaten, but asked if a vehicle could not be hired somewhere in the neighbourhood. The innkeeper swore that this was impossible, but he finally said : " If you would be satisfied, Monsieur le Comte, with one of my post-horses and a postillion's saddle, I might—"

" It matters little to me," interrupted René, " providing I start at once."

" At once ? That can't be. You forget, Monsieur le Comte, that you must appear before the justice of the peace to give your evidence. Ah ! what a fuss the gendarmes will make, and what annoyance I shall have ! But it is no fault of mine that Pierre—the rascal !—contrived to swallow so much brandy before he got on horseback."

" I will write what I have to say, and you can hand it to the magistrate. If he wishes anything more from me, he can write to me to the care of Maître Fouras, the notary."

" What ! are you going to La Rochelle to see Monsieur Fouras ? If so, you won't find him there ; he went by in the coach yesterday with his wife ; he's going to Paris to stay there a month."

This news greatly annoyed René, who wished very much to see the notary ; still he wanted to visit Brouage and his farm, and repair to Marennes also. He now resolved to change his plans. " I won't go to La Rochelle, then," said he ; " but I must go to-night to Rochefort."

" Good ! I understand, Monsieur le Comte, you wish to visit your estates near the Ile d'Oleron—oh, I know the château ; my wife came from that part of the country. Unfortunately, there's no conveyance to-night to Rochefort any more than there's one to La Rochelle."

" I told you that I would content myself with the horse."

" All right, then ! I have a commercial traveller here who is going his rounds selling brandy. He has just hired my grey mare to go to Rochefort, where he expects to meet a friend who will return here with him by way of Tonnay-Charente. I have a pretty little roan, which goes smartly.

If you will try it, I'm sure that it will take you to Rochefort in good time, and if it does not annoy you to keep with the commercial traveller that would—"

"No, no," interrupted the count. "I know the road and do not care to have a companion."

"The fact is, it would suit me better if you would put up with him, for he could bring me back the horse when you leave it at Rochefort, Monsieur le Comte."

"Well, let him take it at the inn where I shall stop, but I prefer to go alone."

"As you please, Monsieur le Comte. The bagman will perhaps start when you do, but he won't annoy you. I will tell him to go on ahead, or to keep back, as you do not desire his company."

"Very well. Give me what I need to write to the magistrate, and saddle the horse. You can send me my valise to-morrow. It is in the mail-coach; address it to Marennes, at the Hôtel de France."

"You shall have it by to-morrow evening, Monsieur le Comte," answered the innkeeper, who seemed much elated by the arrangement which he had effected, so elated, indeed, that he appeared quite consoled as to the accident and the courier's death. He led M. de Brouage into his office, where there was some coarse writing-paper, muddy ink, and stubby pens, and went off to have the roan saddled, while René endeavoured to write out an account of the catastrophe which he very justly attributed to the postillion's drunken condition. When he had finished his report, he looked out of the window which opened upon the yard, and saw that two horses were being saddled, one of which appeared to be for him, as it bore no burden, whereas the other carried a long, slender package behind its saddle. "I will gallop off and leave the bagman behind as soon as I am out of Surgères," thought René, "for I don't want an unpleasant companion."

Then as he had a few moments still to himself, he employed them in thinking over what arrangements he might make in order that his journey should not prove futile. His thoughts then naturally reverted to the woman who had almost urged him to make the trip, the divine Octavie, whom he longed so much to see again. "She loves me," thought he, "what matters anything else!"

The host curtailed his impassioned reverie by announcing that the horse was ready and waiting at the door of the inn. He added that the gendarmes had not yet returned, and that the count would do as well to start before the accident was noised about and inquisitive people arrived to annoy him with questions. Moreover, he assured René that the commercial traveller would not start for fifteen minutes yet, and could not catch up with him on the road, as his mount was not a good one. Thereupon René again promised to leave the nag at Rochefort, at the Hôtel du Grand Bacha, and then critically examined the animal, thought it likely to serve his purpose, and leapt into the saddle, after handsomely requiting the innkeeper's transient hospitality, and paying for the hire of the horse.

He knew that to reach the Rochefort road he must go up the street to a point where three highways met, then turn to the right and pass in front of the old château, a fortress of the fifteenth century, which still retained its towers and wide moat. He took this route, and as soon as he found himself in the open country, he spurred his mount to try its pace, and also so as to get a good start and avoid the companion who had been proposed to him. The roan galloped well, but trotted badly. Moreover, it was not well

trained, and required a good rider to keep it in. René saw that it was inclined to be skittish, and so as to tire it the sooner and have more control over it, he urged it on smartly for a time.

At the end of twenty minutes or so, having it well in hand, he walked it up a somewhat steep hill, and turned to see whether the commercial traveller could be perceived. Indeed, he saw a rider who was not more than a mile beyond Surgères, and who was coming slowly along. "Good!" thought René, "he is mounted on an old worn-out mare. I needn't hurry myself."

The sun was already going down, but the heat had been very great all day, and René felt uncomfortably warm. He took out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead, and found in his pocket some papers which, at first, he did not remember having placed there. Suddenly, however, he recollected that just before leaving Paris he had hurriedly pocketed some letters which he had not taken time to read or even had the curiosity to open, although they had reached him two or three days before. These letters had remained in his pocket without his thinking about them while in the mail-coach. On the way from Paris to Surgères, Octavie alone had occupied his mind.

However, as he was now going up the hill at a walk, he took it into his head to read these neglected communications. The horse, tired by a brisk gallop, followed by a smart trot, and conscious that its rider knew how to manage it, was now obedient. It even seemed somewhat blown, and the count thought that it scarcely deserved the pompous praises of the post-master. He did not trouble himself about that, however, for the journey was a short one, and he did not care what might be the precise hour when he arrived at Rochefort.

The letters interested him more, although he did not see one among them of which he recognized the writing. He let go the reins and tied them to the pommel of his saddle, being sure that he could easily manage the horse with his knees. He had ridden a great deal in England and Ireland during his boyhood; besides, the Brouages were born riders. So he found himself quite at his ease for opening his letters, and read them as composedly as though he had been at his desk at the minister's office.

The first he opened proved unimportant, and he rapidly disposed of them, tearing them into fragments, which he threw to the winds. He had kept for the last an envelope on which his name and address had evidently been written by a feminine hand. This puzzled him the more as he had no acquaintance with any woman excepting Octavie, who had never written to him more than a few lines, just before his departure; a few lines which he carefully treasured, for they ended by the words: "I am yours."

When he read the sentimental, stilted sentences with which Miss Elizabeth Tufton's missive began, he did not at first understand what the letter could possibly mean, and turned over the leaf to look at the signature. Seeing the governess's name at the end of the third page, he could scarcely believe his eyes, and asked himself what the English prude, who blushed whenever a man spoke to her, could possibly have to say to him. It was another matter when he came to that part of the letter in which, with true British plainness, Miss Tufton declared that his cousin loved him. He had to read it over and over again to persuade himself that he was not mistaken, and that Betsy was in earnest. It had never occurred to him that Mademoiselle de Brouage entertained any other feeling for him than cordial friendship. He had looked upon her as a sister, but nothing more. Now, however, he suddenly recalled many little circumstances, which had

previously seemed to him of no importance, but of which he now understood the significance.

Antoinette, he remembered, had always managed to be present whenever he had gone to see the Marquis de Brouage. Whenever the uncle and nephew disagreed she invariably took René's part. She gently upheld him, excused his conduct with infinite tact when he was in the wrong, and often overcame the general's objections, when, as usual, he begun by refusing whatever the young attaché of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked of him. Besides, there was the eloquence of the eyes, that language as legible to lovers as it is mysterious to indifferent folks. When René spoke of his lonely boyhood, his laborious youth, and the painful trials he had undergone in Dublin and London, tears would start from Antoinette's eyes; her cheeks would flush and her eyes sparkle when, leaving the recollections of the sad past aside, the count spoke of his plans, his dreams for the future, or expressed his admiration for a noble deed or a high-minded scheme. And, reverting to his rupture with his uncle, René remembered the conversation which had preceded it. He recalled almost everything that had been said between himself, Antoinette, and the governess, and he understood the fatal error into which his charming cousin had been led.

"She took for herself all that I said about Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér," muttered the young count. "The mistake was natural enough; I talked of a love that I did not dare to confess for fear of being rejected. She thought that I spoke of her. And when she offered to plead my cause, I thanked her so warmly that this confirmed her in her error. I did a bad act without knowing it. How can I atone for it? How can I cure her wounded heart? The poor girl must have been very wretched. And that Betsy, who, I am sure, has kept up her illusions, ought to have told me of her illusion before. I should have tried to dispel it had there still been time, but now the evil, increased by my silence, is perhaps without remedy. If I had only thought of looking at this unlucky letter before leaving Paris, I should not have left without having a full explanation with Miss Tufton. I would have instructed her to tell my cousin what I should never have the courage to say to her in person, whilst now I must write things which ought never to be written—unless indeed I leave her in painful uncertainty. It is truly a fatality!"

After these first reflections, he once more perused the governess's sentimental prose, and his attention was now turned to the passages which indirectly referred to Octavie. And he asked himself, how it was, that General de Brouage, after having in his daughter's presence, spoken of Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér as a worthless woman, now said no more about her. The general had seen Octavie and her father also, as René knew, for Octavie had told him of the terrible marquis's visit. She had, it is true, related its incidents in her own way, suppressing certain delicate parts of the interview.

"He doubtless thinks that I shall not dare to act contrary to his orders," thought the young count. "He fancies that everybody is afraid of him. He does not know that one fears nothing when one loves. And she loves me. In the note which now lies here, upon my heart, she tells me that she does, and that would suffice, had I even no other proof of her love, for Octavie is too proud to lie. She is, besides, too proud to stoop to that man Marcas. Fabien, who accuses her, is blinded by his political fancies. He hates her because she is the daughter of a royalist, an *émigré*. My poor brother has lost his wits ever since he has plunged into revolutionary

intrigues, and his opinions don't affect me. Besides, we have quarrelled, as he compels me to start an action against him. We are almost on as bad terms together as my uncle and myself—I have no one left—no relations, I may say. Fortunately, Octavie remains to me."

At twenty-four, a man doubts nothing, not even a woman's vows, and always hopes that he will find his way out of the most trying situations. On reflecting upon the embarrassment in which he was placed by the love his cousin bore him, René said to himself, that a timid young girl, brought up at a convent, and accustomed to obey her father, would not have had such will and strength of resistance as belonged to Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier.

"My cousin fell in love with me," thought he, "because I was the first young man she met on going into society. At her age, and with the training she has had, a serious attachment isn't possible. I was not displeasing to her, and she was accustomed to see me very frequently. So she imagined that I ought to marry her, because I was poor and she happened to be rich. Miss Betsy must have put these romantic ideas into her head. She will get over them, fortunately. But, if I encouraged her to persist in these notions, I should be a dishonourable man. My duty is to undeceive her at once. To-night, when I reach Rochefort, I will write to Miss Tufton, who is the real cause of the whole trouble. That will be better than deferring a painful, though unavoidable, explanation till my return. If I were in Paris, as Antoinette is under such influence as that of Miss Betsy, she might commit some foolish act, but she will never think of coming after me to Saintonge." With this conclusion the young count put the Englishwoman's letter back into his pocket-book, side by side with Octavie's note.

He then once more took up the reins, and pulled his horse together, so as to start at a trot again. He was reaching the top of the hill, and the roan, sufficiently rested, only asked for a run. René was about to put spurs to him, when he heard the sound of a gallop near by. He turned to see who the rider could be who was so unexpectedly at hand, but did not have time to scrutinize him. A man, mounted upon a horse going at full speed, shot by like a cannon-ball, reached the top of the hill, and disappeared from view. The slope was such that, in the flash of an eye, both man and beast had ceased to be visible, and René, who still walked his horse, said to himself: "That's strange! I am sure that was the postmaster's mare; I recognised the long, slender package she had on her back. The rider must be the commercial traveller. Well, the postmaster said that the mare was a worthless old animal, but I should not think so. I was more than three miles in advance, and now she is ahead of me. It is true that for the last twenty minutes I have been walking my horse, but that fellow must have done the same, as I did not hear him till just now. It seems to me, besides, that he doesn't care to keep me company, as he goes on ahead. So much the better!"

The hill ended in a slightly undulating plateau, over which the road stretched out between expanses of meadow-land like a long yellow ribbon upon a green cloth. Some houses and the steeple of a village church stood out against the sky. The rider who had passed was already far off and still going at a gallop. René had no desire to join him, but he longed to have done with his tiresome journey, and urged on his horse in order to turn the level stretch of road to account. As he trotted along he saw the grey mare scudding along ahead of him, and finally concluded that, in spite

of all the Surgères innkeeper had said, the roan was not her equal in swiftness.

The village which the Count de Brouage soon reached was composed of a few miserable buildings ranged on each side of the way. At the further end of the one street, formed by the high road, he again espied the rider, of whom he had for an instant lost sight, and who had stopped to water his horse. Not caring to come up with him, he slackened speed and went along the village at a walk. He merely saw some women spinning at their doors, and some children rolling in the dust. The men were all away in the fields, with the exception of one fellow who was talking with the traveller on the grey mare.

The villager in question held two farm horses, and the traveller was no doubt saying something of interest to him, for he was listening attentively. However, the conversation did not last long. The grey mare had slaked her thirst. Her rider spurred her up and set off again.

"That's proper," said René, to himself. "He is obeying the orders of the postmaster, who must have told him not to annoy me."

A moment later, he came up to the trough himself, and was going on, when the villager called out to him: "Eh! my good sir! Don't you see that your horse is done up with the heat? If you don't let it dip its nostrils in some cold water, it will have a rush of blood to the head, that's sure."

The count thought that the man might be right, and as he was not sorry to let the commercial traveller get well ahead, he made for the trough, where the roan being really thirsty, began to drink eagerly. The man who had called out to René was a tall, robust-looking individual who had probably served in the cavalry under Napoleon, for he wore heavy moustaches and whiskers cut in military style. He had a short pipe in his mouth and was about to smoke. Some tinder was already on the flint, which he held in his left hand; and with his right hand he was fumbling in his pocket for a steel to strike a light.

"Hallo!" said he, "that's the roan belonging to the postmaster at Surgères. He must have hired all his horses out to-day," and, thereupon, he began to light the tinder.

"What is the name of this village?" asked René.

"Muron, my good sir. You are now only twelve miles from Rochefort. That is a pretty animal," he added, stroking the horse's neck and ears as it lifted its head, and finished drinking.

At the same moment the animal gave a neigh expressive of pain and reared so wildly that M. de Brouage was almost unseated. He was an excellent rider, and had fortunately taken up the reins. So he was able to keep in the saddle, and spurred up the nag, which gave a great leap, fortunately coming down on its hoofs.

Greatly astonished at such behaviour on the part of an animal which he thought he had quieted by an hour's hard riding, the Count de Brouage began to whip it to teach it better ways. He expected that it would plunge about and give him a great deal of trouble, but instead of trying to resist, as it had done on leaving Surgères, it started along the road at a mad gallop.

"Take care that he does not get the better of you," called out the man with the tinder-box, neglecting to light his pipe, perhaps because he had no more tinder left.

The warning came too late, for the horse was uncontrollable, and it was vain to try to do anything with it. René used all the means usual in such

a case, even sawing the animal's mouth with all his might. But it was of no use; the capricious animal seemed to have suddenly become quite wild, and all that the count could do was to let it go on till its strength gave out.

It was not the first time that he had found himself upon the back of a runaway horse, and he knew that in such a case knowledge of riding is of little avail. The maddened animal no longer obeys the hand or the knees. It is as uncontrollable as a maniac, and all that the best rider in the world can do is to keep his scat. He must go where chance directs, and it does not depend upon him to say how the matter will end. He is exposed to be dashed against a wall or a tree, drowned in a river or thrown over a precipice. His only chance is that the horse, when weary, will stop of itself, and this frequently happens when fright or pain has startled the animal. However, for the stopping to be of any avail, the path along which the animal has rushed must be unimpeded. Fortunately, the roan horse had taken the road to Rochefort, which was a wide one, and although it was stony, with frequent ups and downs, still, if the beast kept straight ahead it would not meet with any precipice, hedge, or ditch, and René might hope that the accident would not result in his death. The difficulty lay in keeping the animal in the road, and both coolness and skill were needed to hold it.

M. de Brouage looked along the road to see where he was being carried. Beyond the village the road gradually sloped down and there were banks of turf on either side. Further on, it extended along a valley of no great depth or width, and beyond there was a turn, when it went suddenly up again. The first danger lay in crossing the valley. The count made ready for it by pressing his knees against the animal's sides, and stiffening his forearm so as to resist a pull.

There was no struggle, however. The horse went straight ahead and nothing barred its way. This was a great point, for on going up the slope ahead the furious rapidity of its pace would probably slacken. René thought that this would be the case, but he was entirely mistaken. The horse went up the slope at full speed.

It was running with its nose out, shaking its head and neighing as if in pain. At this moment René saw some smoke rise from the animal's left ear. He understood everything and muttered, "I am lost!"

The man at the water-trough, while caressing the horse, had, through awkwardness, no doubt, let some of the tinder with which he had been about to light his pipe, fall into the animal's ear. The beast was mad with pain. There was no hope that it would quiet down. It would evidently run on till it fell dead.

On the right and left of the road, which was no longer banked at the sides, there stretched an uneven expanse of ground full of pools of muddy water. Five hundred yards away appeared some cottages which stood out, partly obstructing the passage. "It is there that I shall meet my death if I reach the spot," thought René.

But his attention was now called to another object. A rider on a grey mare was going at a walk along the road, paying so little attention to his animal that it was nibbling the grass as it paced on. The man seemed to be asleep in the saddle, and he could be none other than the commercial traveller who seemed to haunt the Count de Brouage like an evil genius.

The noise of the mad gallop behind him aroused him, no doubt. However, he did not turn, but put spurs to his mare, and she started off at a

gallop. This frightened the roan, which swerved from the road. René's wrists were almost broken in trying to hold him in, but he did not succeed. From this moment he clearly realised that his life was henceforth in the hands of Heaven, and he did not attempt to resist his fate. Like the captain of a rudderless ship, he could only await the inevitable. By an un hoped-for chance, however, instead of going straight upon a high wall which closed in a field near by, the nag galloped along, in the same direction as the road, that is towards the south. The soil was smooth but rather boggy; it was damp meadowland, and the horse's hoofs sunk into it. René could not have hoped for anything better, for the animal's speed abated, and he was already thinking that he might rid himself of the stirrups, and let himself fall upon the soft grass, but the enraged animal crossed the field with a few strides, and came upon firmer ground over which it tore more furiously than ever.

It now followed a by-road which served no doubt for rural traffic, for there were plenty of ruts made by cart-wheels. The question was to know where it ended. It ran along near the main road but below it; and when the count raised his eyes, he saw that the grey mare and its rider were keeping along the highway some ten feet above him. The commercial traveller no doubt wished to see the result of this equestrian drama, but he manifested no intention of giving any assistance, perhaps because he knew that all attempts would be useless.

René caught but a glimpse of him, and did not look again. He needed all his coolness to find out where the mad gallop of his steed would take him. Suddenly the road widened, and a strange-looking plain appeared. It was a vast expanse of greyish hue cut across by low embankments between which there were pools of water shining in the sun.

The count saw that these were some of the salt marshes so numerous in Basse Saintonge. He knew them well, for his estate at Brouage produced less wheat than salt, and he knew that it would not be very dangerous to be thrown into one of the pools, for there was no risk either of drowning or being choked by the mud. The roan went straight towards them, and the mad run would certainly have ended here had not the man on the grey mare again turned up.

He had changed his mind, apparently, and leaving the high road had come up in time to try to arrest the course of the roan; with this laudable intention he was now gesticulating and shouting so that René's steed again changed its course.

Instead of keeping on over the marshes, it turned to the right, and the count saw at once that he was lost if he remained in the saddle. A hundred yards ahead, the soil sank abruptly, and a little further on there was a deep pit, a peat quarry. A fall from this height would be fatal. It was better to run the risk of alighting before the horse had time to leap.

René made the attempt, it was his last chance! He freed himself from the stirrups, bent over the horse's neck, seized hold of its mane with one hand, while with the other he clutched the pommel of the saddle, let himself slip till his feet touched the ground, and finally let go his hold.

Launched forward like a ball, he rolled upon the grass, and such was his tumble, that for a moment he half lost consciousness. When he recovered, after rolling over several times, he found that he had fallen within four yards of the edge of the precipice. The roan had not stopped, but had fallen to the bottom of the pit, which was fifty feet deep. Had M. de

Brouage delayed his attempt a couple of seconds longer, he would have gone over the brink with the animal.

The first thought of René, when thus miraculously preserved, was to thank Heaven for sparing his life ; but as he rose, after a few words of prayer, he saw before him the rider whose unlucky arrival had nearly cost him his life. The sight made him extremely angry, for he remembered that ever since they had left Surgères the man had seemed anxious to exasperate him, by constantly placing himself in his way. "Do you know, sir," said he, without taking time to examine him, "your conduct is very singular."

"In what respect, sir?" demanded the traveller, alighting from his horse.

"You saw that my horse was running away, and you set your mare going at full speed at the moment when I came near you on the road ; then, not satisfied with that, when my horse, frightened by the galloping of your mare, had turned into a meadow and was on the way to a marsh which would have checked its course, you barred its way. It really looks as though you had sworn to make my horse kill me."

"Your horse kill you? No, such was not my intention."

"You are very awkward then, and I wish to know why you have been following me."

"To help you if you had any mishap."

"I do not wish for your help, and I beg of you to leave me."

"In this meadow? You cannot mean to remain here?"

"I mean to reach Rochefort to-night."

"So do I, but I am mounted and you are not."

Surprised at the turn which the conversation had taken, René began to gaze attentively at the stranger who took so persistent an interest in his affairs. He saw that he was young, and did not look in the least like a commercial traveller. In fact, his dark complexion, restless black eyes, mobile physiognomy, slender figure, and sinewy limbs, made him resemble a Catalonian bandit. The Count de Brouage had a vague remembrance of having somewhere seen this singular-looking fellow before, and began to believe that he had some special motive for following him. To enlighten himself on this point, he abruptly asked him : "Do you intend, then, to offer me your mare? I would pay you well for it, for I am in a great hurry."

"I cannot let you have on hire an animal that does not belong to me, and I have not the least desire to lend it to you."

"Why did you alight, then?"

"Because I wish to speak with you."

"With me. You do not know me."

"I beg your pardon, I know that you are Count René de Brouage, the nephew of General, the Marquis de Brouage, peer of France."

"I see that the postmaster at Surgères has given you some information, but I don't know what there can be in common between us."

"Ah ! you are astonished that I should attempt to talk to you, as I am not a nobleman, and haven't an uncle in the Chamber of Peers."

"This is really too much ! You surely do not expect me to reply to such nonsense, and you did not follow me here, I suppose, to rail at the nobility."

"Not exactly, although your being a nobleman has something to do with the business which I have with you. You are a royalist and a count ; I am a plebeian and a revolutionist. So you are my enemy."

"And under the pretext that I am your political enemy, you probably intend to murder me. The spot is well chosen, and we are alone."

"I wish to fight a duel with you," calmly replied the traveller.

"A duel with me!" exclaimed René. "You must be insane!"

"I am not, and I assert that we are about to fight."

"Here?"

"Here, at this moment."

"Without seconds, then?"

"Yes, unless you absolutely desire to have any, in which case I will find some at the hamlet on the road yonder."

"You have arms then?"

"Yes, I have brought swords with me, you see—there—behind my saddle."

"You have prepared everything, it appears, and this looks like an ambush."

"I don't deny that I left Surgères with the intention of coming up to you on the road, but all that I propose is a regular duel. You must know how to handle a sword, as fencing is part of a nobleman's education; I learned it by chance only, and am probably not as skilful as yourself. The contest is therefore about equal."

"You confess that you really intended to pick a quarrel with me?"

"I do."

"Why didn't you do so then at the inn?"

"Because I did not wish that our meeting should make a stir."

"I understand; you have reasons for hiding your motives?"

"Yes, they are these: I have resolved either to kill you or be killed by you, because you are my political enemy. If we had fought over there, all Surgères would have known it, and I should soon have had the police at my heels."

"Whilst if you kill me at the bottom of a lonely quarry, you can make off without being accused of my death."

"That is the truth."

"And you think that I shall be fool enough to accept a challenge under such conditions?"

"I did and do believe it."

"Well, pray abandon the opinion, for I firmly refuse to fight. A man who prepares a meeting as though it were an ambuscade does not deserve that I should do him the honour of crossing swords with him."

"Are you afraid then?" said the stranger, in the most insolent tone he could assume.

"You know very well that I am not, since you know me," replied the Count de Brouage, quietly. "I see perfectly well what your aim is. You are trying to exasperate me by insults; you will not succeed. What you say is perfectly indifferent to me, and as I have no motive for fighting with you, I repeat that I shall not do so."

"I have told you why I wish to fight."

"Because my opinions in politics are not the same as your own. That might be a good reason if we were at one of the cafés at the Palais Royal, where people go to find a pretext for a duel, or if you had publicly insulted me for political reasons."

"So if I insulted you here, it wouldn't amount to the same thing?"

"If you dare to touch me I will kill you like a dog," replied the count. And at the same time he drew from his pocket a pistol with which he had

provided himself before starting on his journey. "You see," he added, "that if you attack me, I have the means of defending myself."

"I see," replied the traveller, "that I must take other means. You refuse to fight, you say, because you will not fight without a reason. Learn, then, that you will be forced to do so some day, for an Association of patriots has sworn to exterminate your race. Your cousin has already fallen."

"You confess that your friends murdered him !"

"I confess that one of them killed the son of the Marquis de Brouage, but he killed him in a regular duel."

"As regular as that which you now propose," said René, with contemptuous irony.

"I declare to you that you are condemned to death," resumed the stranger.

"And you have no doubt been sent to kill me."

"Listen to me, and my frankness will prove that I speak the truth. You are condemned, I tell you. Orders have been given to all the brethren of a secret society, to put you out of the way, and they are allowed to choose their own method. Would you like to have proof of it? Well, the man who drove the mail-coach was paid to upset it."

"Paid by you, of course."

"Paid by me, who knew that you would not be killed by the overturning of a coach, and only wished to interrupt your journey."

"Well and good ! You only killed the unfortunate courier. It was also you, I presume, who told the man at the trough to slip some tinder into my horse's ear ?"

"If I had wished to get rid of you by means like those, it would have been easy for me to do so, and I should not have taken the trouble to bring swords with me. I came on ahead because I wished to find a spot fit for a duel without seconds, and not too far from the road. Moreover, I intended to stop you as soon as I found such a place. But you did not allow me time for that. I saw you come up on your horse which was running away with you. What could I do, but what I did? You have escaped death, and I am delighted at it, for I have an especial desire that you should die by my hand. You see that I don't hide the truth. And I repeat that you would do best to take me as an adversary, for you may be able to kill me. Others will be less scrupulous, and won't risk their lives against yours."

"So be it, then ! I will run the risk of being murdered before reaching Rochefort ; but to imitate your frankness, I warn you that if I reach it, I shall go to the royal prosecutor and tell him what has happened here. He will probably take measures to prevent your friends and you from acting in the same way again. However, I shall not tell him your name, as I do not know it, and you may escape. But the secret society to which you belong will do well to be on its guard. And, as a final warning, let me tell you that you are a very imprudent member, for you tell a man whom it has proscribed, about all the rascalities it commits."

The stranger started, and said in a husky tone : "Do you think that I should tell you these secrets if I were not sure that you would never betray them ?"

"I have just told you that I shall do so the first thing."

"No, for you shall not reach Rochefort."

"We shall see !"

"You shall not, unless you succeed in killing me, as we shall fight."

"What! Again?"

"Oh! this time I am sure that you will not refuse, for I shall now tell you the whole truth."

"You have been lying so far, then?"

"Yes. I invented these excuses to force you to fight. I did not wish to bring a woman's name into the affair, but I now see that I must do so, so as to force you to make up your mind."

"A woman's name!" repeated the count, startled, and almost anxious.

"Yes, but you must first hear my name. It is Marcas."

"I never heard it before."

"You have forgotten it, but you will certainly remember it when I tell you that I am Monsieur de Saint-Héliér's secretary."

"What! is it you?—ah! I remember you now and recollect your face. We met last week, one night at the Tivoli Gardens."

"We did. You came to the gardens with your brother, and left him to speak to Monsieur de Saint-Héliér, whom I accompanied. Do you understand now?"

"No more than before," replied M. de Brouage, in order to force the student to explain himself.

"You don't understand because you won't, and you force me to tell you all. Well, that night, Monsieur de Saint-Héliér was not alone. His daughter was with him."

"Well!" exclaimed René, who was fairly shaking with rage.

"You cannot deny that you are a suitor to the hand of Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér. You confessed it to her, and so plainly that I heard you."

"You were listening, then?"

"I was listening, that is true. Besides, I was close to you and you paid no more heed to me than to the lamps hanging near the park trees. You did not even ask me why I was so near. You knew, however, that I was employed at Monsieur de Saint-Héliér's house. But I was of no more account to you than a servant."

"What is the object of all this declamation?"

"To show you that you were mistaken in treating me like an unimportant subaltern. I am not a nobleman like yourself, but I am of as much account as you are, and I also aspire to marry Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér."

René de Brouage turned pale at hearing these words, which were spoken with the most insulting assurance. His brother Fabien's warnings were not without foundation, it appeared. Fabien had declared that there was a perfect understanding between the chevalier's daughter and his secretary, and the complicity of which he accused them was suddenly proved by the audacious avowal of the student.

"We are rivals, you see," resumed Marcas.

"I do not believe it," said the count scornfully. "It does not suffice that you have formed a mad project for me to look upon you as my rival."

"You are sure that it is mad, then? You are quite sure that Monsieur de Saint-Héliér would refuse me as a son-in-law? But I shall one of these days be rich, for my father is worth six hundred thousand francs."

"I am sure that Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér will never consent to become your wife."

"Because she has consented to be yours, you mean to say?"

"Exactly."

"And because she loves you?"

"You have said it."

"Very well! Now I understand that you don't care to risk your life against that of the first man that comes along. For to you I am merely the 'first man that comes along.' Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier does not, and cannot love me, you think, and it is only mean jealousy that urges me on, so that you are not bound to give me satisfaction. Such is your view of the matter, eh?"

"You save me the trouble of telling you so."

"But what if you were altogether wrong; what if I showed you that I am seriously disputing the heart of your betrothed with you, and have a better chance than you have of winning it?—your opinion would change, then, would it not, and you would admit that one of us is in the other's way?"

"Perhaps; but I repeat to you that Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier has given me her promise, and I have given her mine."

"Shall I prove to you that she is my mistress?"

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed René.

"Ah! you are not so calm as you were before. You are now at the point to which I wished to bring you," said Marcas, mockingly.

"Well, then, I am; by insulting the woman whom I respect and love, you have succeeded in forcing me to fight with you; we will fight, but you shall first retract what you have said, or I will treat you as a vile slanderer."

"I will retract nothing."

"Take care!" cried René, raising the pistol which he still held. "You have been ordered to murder me. I will blow out your brains, if you don't confess that you have lied like a coward!"

Marcas, without being in the slightest degree disturbed by this threat, took a note-book from his pocket, opened it, and offered M. de Brouage a missive which he drew from it. "Read this before you blow out my brains," he said quietly.

René read it, as he was requested, and turned pale. He had at once recognised the handwriting of Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier; besides, the note was signed "Octavie." It contained but few words, for the golden-haired beauty had a concise style; but these words were sufficiently plain, and it ended thus: "You are brave. I love you, and am yours, no matter *what may happen*." The last words being underlined.

"You can see that the letter was addressed to me," resumed Marcas, pointing to his own name on the outside of the folded paper.

René saw that it was there, and muttered: "This is too much infamy!"

"If this proof is not enough, I have more," said Marcas, with a sneer.

René did not reply. The horrible revelation had stunned him, and Marcas took advantage of his stupor to strike a final blow. "Pray listen to me, Monsieur le Comte," said he, changing his tone. "When you have heard me, I hope that you will no longer doubt my sincerity, for this time, I shall tell you everything without reserve. I have, indeed, been ordered by my political brethren to put you out of their way. The choice of means has been left to me; and the leaders of the secret society to which I belong, would prefer, I believe, that your death should be attributed to an accident. The society has members everywhere: it has a great many in this part of the country, for the Bourbons are not liked here, or their government either. You have been pointed out to these people, and your coming was known before you left Paris. There is not, perhaps,

in the whole department, a single village where they are not on the lookout for you. I previously told you that the postillion at Surgères upset the coach intentionally. Just now, in the village we passed through, the man who was watering his horses, after exchanging the signal of the brotherhood with me, asked me if you were not the Count de Brouage, and when I told him that you were, he at once played you a trick. I should not be surprised to learn that he intentionally dropped the burning tinder into your horse's ear; but I declare that I said nothing to him, and that if I had known his intention, I should have tried to prevent him from carrying it into effect."

"I did not know that you were so kindly disposed," replied René, bitterly.

"You must, however, understand that I wish that you should die by my hand," replied the student with ferocious frankness. "I wish it, not in order to obey my chiefs, but because I hate you, because we both love the same woman, and because that woman wishes that I should kill you."

"That is not true! it is impossible!"

"She has written to me to that effect in the clearest terms, telling me that you were about to make this journey, and that she relied upon me to prevent your return. Shall I show you her letter?"

"No," replied M. de Brouage, with an effort. "Take back this note. It tells me enough. She who wrote it at the very time when she swore eternal love to me is fully capable of having sentenced me to death and having charged you with executing me."

"Then you consent to fight?"

"On two conditions."

"I accept them, without asking what they are."

"In the first place, we must have seconds."

"You are afraid, then, that I shall murder you?"

"No; but I do not wish to be accused of murdering you, for on my side I wish to kill you."

"That is but just," replied Marcas, in a tone of irony. "Well, I don't ask any better terms if we can find seconds. All that I desire is that we should fight to-night."

"I desire it as much as you do. If we cannot have two seconds, one will suffice, and we can find one at the hamlet over there; we can find some peasant who won't refuse to be present at our duel."

"I don't know; peasants don't like to compromise themselves—but we might perhaps find some old soldier. What is the second condition?"

"Before fighting I wish to write a letter."

"To Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier?"

"Yes. And I exact your promise not to prevent this letter from reaching its destination if I am not alive to send it."

"I swear upon my honour that it shall be sent."

"That is all that I have to say. Come!"

René went towards the cottages which bordered the road, and Marcas followed him, leading the grey mare by the bridle. Octavie's two suitors did not exchange a word during the walk which was not of long duration. Both were lost in thought; but the student was exultant, for he had reached the aim he had scarcely hoped to attain. He had spoken the truth in saying that the attempts made upon the Count de Brouage's life since the morning had not been initiated by himself. Orders had come from the high *venta* which had sent another emissary ahead of Marcas. In twenty-

four hours all the Knights of Liberty scattered throughout the Deux Charentes had been instructed to run down an enemy whose name was sent to them, together with a description of his person. Marcas also had his mission, and his chiefs relied much more upon him than upon the obscure and often timid brethren thus warned. If the Count de Brouage escaped the snares which others were about to place in his way, Marcas had orders to kill him in a duel. Now, the Gascon, unscrupulous, but brave and self-sufficient, preferred a duel to murder. His greatest desire was certainly to put his rival out of the way, but the satisfaction to be derived from René's death would not have been complete had the count been killed by an *accident* prepared by the brethren of the Coral Pin.

Before leaving Paris, Marcas had written to Octavie that he meant to be the victor, and had supplemented the assurance by a quotation from the "Cid." He wished to be able to say on his return: "I have conquered at the risk of my life," for it was only thus that he could hope to win the love of the Zimena of the Place Royale.

However, the roan colt had very nearly saved him the trouble and danger of dispatching M. de Brouage to another world. The student knew very well that the postillion would overthrow the mail-coach at the side of a ditch, and he had waited at the inn at Surgères to learn the result of this attempt. When he saw the count he made arrangements with the innkeeper, who was also in the plot, and decided to waylay his enemy on the road to Rochefort and force him to fight. The plan had come near failure by the fault of an old rascal, a Knight of Liberty, who had taken it into his head to slip some tinder into the horse's ear, so that the young nobleman might get his neck broken by a spill.

Marcas had for an instant feared that the count and he would never fight; and he sincerely rejoiced when he found that it was still possible for them to come to an issue. It must be added that Marcas, who was the pride of various fencing-galleries and the inventor of numerous secret thrusts, felt perfectly sure of killing his antagonist. Indeed, Marcas was as pleased as René was the reverse. The young count had a worse wound at heart than a sword's point could inflict. He was wounded in his love and pride and almost in his honour, for he felt degraded. All had given way at once: his illusions, hopes, and plans for the future. The happiness he had looked for and had sacrificed everything to attain was now at an end. The horizon had grown narrow. Life seemed impossible. He only longed to die.

He certainly tried to doubt, to deny evidence and persuade himself that his eyes had deceived him as to the letter, and that the adorable Octavie, whose tender vows he still seemed to hear, had not basely betrayed him and planned his death at the very moment when she had sworn to be his forever. But the horrible reality was there. He was obliged to believe in her treason, since he had seen its written proof, and what a proof! The unworthiness of the base creature was apparent in every word. "What had I done to her?" the unhappy count asked himself. "Why has she chosen me as a victim? What is the object of this infamous treachery? She did not covet my fortune, for she knew that I had none. Did she intend that my name should cover her infamous intrigue with this rascally secretary. Or was she sacrificing me to her ambition, merely tempted by the title of countess?"

René forgot that Octavie had for a time believed that he would inherit his uncle's peerage if his cousin Henri died, and he did not know that since

the general's visit she was aware that this would not be the case. This, had he known it, would have explained Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier's course of conduct. But he was not the man to imagine such depravity as hers. He could only curse the perfidious creature, and he feared lest he might still love her, for he felt that it would be sweet, indeed, to revenge himself upon Marcas, who had robbed him of his affianced bride. However, a sweet thought arose in the midst of his rage, and shone like a rainbow shines after a storm. He thought of the pure young girl who loved him in silence and suffered for his sake. He called up the sweet image of Antoinette de Brouage and said to himself that he might have been happy in her love. Then he reproached himself with not having read her young heart; and saying to himself that he had acted cruelly in requiting sincere attachment with indifference, he cursed the fatality which had urged him to involuntarily mislead his cousin, and determined to repair the harm which he had done. "It is to her that I will write," he said to himself, "for if I fall she alone will mourn my death. The other—ah! the other is impatiently waiting for the return of the lover whom she ordered to kill me."

He now reached the hamlet which consisted of four or five squalid houses, one of which was a little better than the rest. Marcas went up to it, tied his horse to a nail driven into the wall to serve that purpose, and unceremoniously entered the place. He authoritatively took the direction of affairs, and René made no objection.

The room into which the count followed the student was plainly furnished, but very neatly kept. The oaken table shone like mahogany, and the kitchen utensils hanging about gleamed like silver-plate. There were two windows open upon a garden full of flowers, and the joyous rays of a warm spring sun streamed in. At the back of the room some stairs led to an upper story, the front of which was covered with clematis and ivy. The little house seemed to be the abode of some happy man who knew how to live peacefully. But no master presented himself to receive the two travellers, and there was apparently no woman there, no children, no servants. In the place of a spinning-wheel there was an old gun near the mantel-piece, and against the wall, in a white-wood frame, hung a printed paper which appeared to be a testimonial for some brave deed. It seemed that this must be the dwelling of some old soldier, and Marcas congratulated himself upon having made so good a choice.

He pushed open a door which communicated with the garden, and saw the owner busy trimming his rose-bushes. He was a man of fifty, tall, thin and straight as a poplar, with a heavy bushy moustache and a stern but not unpleasing face. He turned at the sound of Marcas's footsteps, and came towards him. René also had entered the garden, but kept back, preferring to allow his adversary to make the preliminary arrangements for the duel. The student took the measure of the master of the house from head to foot, and at once suspected that he was a Knight of Liberty. This lover of roses quite realised the type of the old sergeant in Béranger's song, and almost all the non-commissioned officers of the Empire belonged to the Knights of Liberty Association, which was similar to the Carbonari. Marcas, therefore, risked making the signal, which was at once understood and returned. The envoy of the high *venta* could not have made a better hit.

The veteran's eyes asked whether René was a "brother" also, and when a negative sign was given he quietly asked: "What can I do to serve you, gentlemen?"

"It is hard to explain," said the student, "but you have been a soldier, it is easy to see."

"I went into service in '92 and was discharged in 1815, when the army of the Loire was disbanded. My name is Jacques Arvert. I was quartermaster in the Horse Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, and it is now six years since I came to live here in this house which belonged to my father."

"You are not married, then?"

"No, thank Heaven!"

"So much the better; if there were a woman here I should not dare to ask you to—"

"To do what?"

"To let us use your garden to fight a duel in and to act as our second."

The old soldier did not shrink from this proposal, which would have frightened a peasant. He quietly replied: "One doesn't refuse to be a comrade's second, but we never served together. Tell me what you are going to fight about, and I will decide as to whether I will be your second or not."

"I might make up some story, but I prefer to tell you plainly that we are fighting for political reasons, and also on account of a woman. We have no lack of motives, as you see."

"Those are not good ones."

"We have none better, however, and we consider them excellent."

"But if you cannot agree, how does it happen that you are travelling together? You do not belong to these parts?"

"This gentleman does, but I don't. We met by chance at Surgères, and both of us come from Paris. We had a very serious quarrel long ago, and as it happened, we were both going to Rochefort; we were going there on horseback. On the way we talked together and settled it between us that we would fight it out this very night. We needed a second and a place where we should be undisturbed. We saw your house and came here. It was lucky that we did, as you are an old soldier, acquainted with such matters, and not afraid to be a second in a duel."

"I am not afraid of anything except getting into trouble with the gendarmes. If you kill one another here, they will come here, and I don't want that. Besides, politics have something to do with the matter, and that is the very thing that troubles me, because, between ourselves, the authorities consider me suspicious. You know that I served *the other one*. That does not commend me to the present authorities."

"If you refuse," replied Marcas, with a peculiar air, "we shall only be obliged to go somewhere else to cross swords, and not far off either, for we are in a hurry, and you may have just as much annoyance if one of us falls, while by lending us your garden it would be easy to hide the thing, and I know persons in Paris who would thank you for your consent."

Jacques Arvert looked searchingly at Marcas. He understood that what he was asked to do would be agreeable to the high *venta*, and was quite disposed to consent. "If that be the case," said he, "speak plainly. I will lend you my garden. The hedge is high and thick. You will be quite at home. I even consent to be present and to give the word. I understand all that. But you must first answer all my questions. In the first place, who are you two gentlemen?"

"I," replied the student, "am Victorin Marcas. I am a law student and live in Paris, and am now travelling for political reasons. I don't hide

it even in presence of this gentleman, who is the Count de Brouage, and owns a château on the seashore between Rochefort and Marennes."

"The Count de Brouage!" exclaimed the veteran. "Why, I know that gentleman. I saw him at the farm lately. His farmers are friends of mine. He resembles this gentleman, but this gentleman isn't he."

"You saw my brother Fabien," said René. "He was here two months ago."

"Ah, I see! I have heard of you. You and your brother are nephews of the general."

"Yes."

"He is a brave man. I never served under him, but I have seen him under fire. It is a pity he has forgotten that it was the Emperor who gave him his epaulets."

"Excuse me," replied René, impatiently, "there is no question of my uncle in all this. We have a duel to fight, and—"

"I am coming to that," interrupted the retired soldier. "You have made up your minds to fight and fight seriously."

"We shall fight till one of us is killed."

"Or is so seriously wounded as not to be able to fight any longer. There is never any certainty of being killed at once. Well, then, in either case, I must be secured against being troubled by the authorities. I don't wish to be accused of having allowed a murder."

"The survivor will attest that all was regular," replied Marcas.

"What if there be no survivor? You may run one another through. I saw such a case at Magdeburg, in 1806. Or the survivor may take to his heels at once. I prefer to have a written declaration. It is safer."

"Do not let that stand in your way," said René, at once. "I will write it out in such a way that you will have no trouble, and we will both sign it."

Marcas said not a word. The precaution did not please him at all, and he winked at the old trooper in order to let him know this. But Jacques Arvert remained perfectly frigid. It was evident that he was not to be moved. The student thought that after the fight, in which he expected to conquer, he would have abundant time to convince the old trooper that he had better burn the paper so as not to compromise a delegate of the high *venta*, and get rid of M. de Brouage's body by carrying it to the bottom of the quarry where the horse had been killed. "Very well," said he, "we will sign. Is that all?"

"I warn you, besides," resumed the ex-grenadier, "that I shall wish to direct the duel as I see fit. I will give the signals, and sha'n't allow anything irregular. I was an army fencing-master once, and I know what I am talking about."

René made a sign of assent, but Marcas muttered: "The devil take the old leather-breeches with his regulations! He will be finding fault with my way of fighting."

"One word more," continued Jacques Arvert. "If there be nothing more than a bad wound, I shall take care of the wounded party here in my house."

"Are you a surgeon, then?" asked Marcas, in an ironical tone.

"No, but I have dressed the wounds of more men than you have fought duels, or ever will, young man, and if there should be an operation necessary, I know a surgeon at Rochefort who won't betray me, for he is a friend of the old army. He will willingly help me. Now, I have no more to say. Do my conditions suit you?"

"Quite so," replied Octavie's suitors.

"Then, I will give you writing materials," said the old soldier, opening a cupboard, from which he took some paper, goose quills, and an inkstand. René, longing to end all this at once, seated himself at the table in the middle of the room, and dashed off a few lines, which he then read aloud: "We, the undersigned, declare upon our honour that, having quarrelled on the road between Surgères and Rochefort, we have made up our minds to fight this evening, in the garden belonging to Jacques Arvert, formerly a soldier, who, at our urgent request, kindly consents to be our second. We have given him this attestation, so that he may not be annoyed in case either of us should fall in this duel, which we hereby declare to be voluntary and regular."

"That will do," said the veteran. "Date it and sign it."

"What is the name of this hamlet?" asked René.

"The Ile-d'Albe."

René wrote the date, the 31st of May, 1821, the name of the place and his own. Marcas also signed unhesitatingly. He intended to sermonize the old trooper after despatching M. de Brouage.

"Good!" said Jacques Arvert, putting the paper into his waistcoat pocket. "With a certificate like that I fear no one. Duelling is not forbidden if it be according to rule, and as regards that, I know what is regular. Now, gentlemen, I warn you that you will have a good fight; I have two capital cavalry swords of the same length, easy to handle, and with a good edge. With those little playthings you can do much better work than with foils, and slight wounds with them are less dangerous. Besides, you will have to satisfy yourselves with them, for I have no rapiers."

"I have brought some duelling swords," said Marcas.

The veteran looked at him with some surprise, but quickly remembered that the duel now about to take place in his garden had been pre-arranged by at least one of the two antagonists, so he said nothing on the point but merely asked: "Where are your toasting-forks?"

"Behind the saddle of my mare, at your door."

"Your mare mustn't stop there. If the gendarmes pass, they are so inquisitive that they will ask whether I am keeping a tavern."

He went out as he spoke, and brought the mare right into the room, after which he locked the door. "Where is your horse?" he said to René, as he unwrapped the swords.

"It ran away with me as we left Muron," said René, "and fell over the edge of a quarry, where it lies. It is a miracle that I was not killed with it."

"The Pécheries quarry! The deuce! that's bad! The rural guard will find the horse's body and make a report. From whom did you hire it?"

"From the postmaster at Surgères."

"He gave me the grey mare, too," said Marcas; "there will be no trouble with him."

The old soldier probably agreed with the student, for he knew the postmaster. He said no more, but began to examine the swords with the air of a connoisseur. "The blades are good," said he; "not quite heavy enough, but you can hold them all the longer. Only you know what they are, young man, as you brought them. This gentleman has a right to refuse them if he has never tried them. If he does not like them, he can have my sabres."

"I will choose the swords," replied the Count de Brouage. "I do not know how to handle sabres."

"Your uncle never gave you any lessons, then, for he knew what to do with a sabre. At Eylau, he split the head of a Russian cuirassier through his helmet. But if you prefer swords it's your own affair. All is ready now; we can begin, and in fact it would be as well to begin at once, for it will be sunset in twenty minutes from now."

"I have a letter to write," replied René. "It will be soon done."

"Good! I understand—a farewell to your lady-love. One never knows what may happen—there's another sheet of paper there—write away, young man! I wish to say a word or two to this gentleman." And while the count took up the pen, the veteran pulled Marcas by the sleeve and made him go into the garden with him. When there, he looked fixedly at him and said: "You are one of the brethren of the Coral Pin; I am a Knight of Liberty. It is just the same thing. I had a message yesterday, telling me to prevent the Count de Brouage from going on his way. You bring him here; he consents, I don't know why, by the way, to fight with you, and you are going to try to kill him, that's evident. I make no opposition; I even wish you success, as you are one of us, and I don't like the nobility; however, everything must be done in a regular manner. If you mean to do anything treacherous as regards the young man, you had better go elsewhere; for I tell you plainly that at the first doubtful thrust I shall stop the duel and you will have to deal with me."

"Why do you suspect me of wishing to do anything unfair?" demanded Marcas, somewhat taken aback.

"I don't suspect you, I merely warn you, because you might think that I am a man to do anything for our party. Well, I would do anything but a rascally act. So, make certain that if this young man is seriously wounded; I shall take as good care of him as though he were the nephew of the Emperor, instead of being the nephew of a man who has left us to go over to the Bourbons."

"You can take care of him if there be occasion for it," replied Marcas, with an evil smile. "Besides, we shall talk better after the duel."

"You think that you are quite sure to come out of it without a scratch, do you? The count must know something about fencing, however. Such gentlemen learn fencing when they learn Latin, and are fonder of it. However, it's your own business. Let us go and find him. He must have finished writing."

René had finished, in fact. He had just sealed the letter with a wafer and was addressing it. But it was not intended for Octavie. He wished to repair the harm which he had done to Antoinette de Brouage, and he said to himself that if he were killed it would be better that the noble young girl should never know the truth, but retain her illusions and continue to think that he whom she loved had loved her in return. And he ended by saying: "In a few moments I shall fight a duel with a man who has greatly insulted me. If this letter reaches you, it will be that I have been killed or am seriously wounded. Forgive me for having disposed of my life. I longed to devote it to you, and I swear to you that my last thought will be of you."

He hesitated for a moment before appending the name of the place where he now was, but he reflected that the letter would not be sent unless he was killed, and that it would then be important that his brother should know where he had died. So he dated the missive from "A hamlet called Ile d'Albe, near the village of Muron, on the road from Surgères to Rochefort."

"Well, young man, are you ready?" asked the old soldier.

"Yes, sir," said the count, "here is a letter which I confide to you."

"Give it to me, and on my word as a grenadier, no one shall touch it should you come to grief. I would sooner go all the way to Rochefort to post it myself."

While Jacques Arvert was putting the count's letter into his pocket, Marcas looked strangely enough, for he had thought that the letter would be handed to him by his very confiding antagonist, and he had probably intended to read it before sending it on. René, who guessed his thoughts, said to him in a scornful tone: "Don't be alarmed, sir, the letter is not addressed to the person who is the cause of our quarrel, and there is nothing in it to harm you. You are not even mentioned in it, I declare it to you, and my word ought to suffice."

"You have talked long enough, young people," said the old soldier. "The light is getting low already, and in a quarter of an hour you won't be able to see what you are about. You must settle matters properly and not put each other's eyes out, you know."

These last words were certainly calculated to make the student start, for he was thinking of his famous thrust in the eye. However, he did not reply. The ex-grenadier had taken the swords under his arm and now went into the garden, followed by the men who wished to kill each other.

The grey mare, fastened by the bridle to a leg of the table, remained alone in the room into which the master of the house had brought her, and she stood as meekly as though she had been in a stable, her last gallop having tired her out. As Jacques Arvert had said, a high hedge ran round the garden, or rather enclosure, for far beyond the flower-beds, bright with roses, there was an orchard full of cherry-trees. In this spot, shut out from inquisitive glances, one might fence at ease unknown to anybody. Besides, the hamlet of the Ile d'Albe, which afterward attained to some importance, then had scarcely twenty inhabitants, who at that moment were in the fields.

Arvert led the two young men to the end of the orchard, to a spot he had previously decided upon, and which admitted of fencing according to rule. It was a smooth and level spot, a kind of arena, limited by four cherry-trees. Nothing was wanting. There was space and light, and the sun, which was now low on the horizon, was not in the eyes of the combatants.

The veteran, while they were removing their coats, picked up a solid lath of some little length, with which he had probably staked peas, and which he intended to use in place of the usual walking-stick. "Let us understand one another before beginning," said he. "You want to kill each other; that is all very well, but you must do it in proper style, and I shall direct you. The first of you who doesn't stop when I lower my stick, will have to fight me, and let me tell you, it would be a bad look-out for either of you, for you cannot handle a sword as I can, young men. If you wound each other I shall decide when there is enough of it. No objections to make? No, well then, Monsieur le Comte, take one of these spits. They belong to the other gentleman. It is the least he can do to let you have your choice."

The ex-grenadier, in his majestic attitude, looked like the father of the Horatii whom David has depicted, making his sons swear, before giving them the swords with which they are to exterminate the Curatii. How-

ever, René and Marcas did not look at all like Romans preparing to die for their country.

René was full of calm resolution ; he did not strike attitudes, as the phrase goes. Marcas, very much excited, but master of himself, calculated his chances as he looked askance at his adversary, asking himself how he should begin the attack. René carelessly took one of the swords held out to him by Jacques Arvert ; the student took the other, and they assumed their positions.

"One moment !" called out the old trooper, "you must prove to me that you have no forbidden clothes on."

"Be easy as to that, I don't wear a coat of mail," replied Marcas, unfastening his shirt.

The remark had evidently been intended for him, for Jacques Arvert looked carefully at him, whilst he barely glanced at the Count de Brouage, who also had uncovered his chest. "Are you surprised?" asked the veteran. "Well, then, young people, let me inform you that we men of the horse grenadiers used to fight naked to the belt. Go, on, now," he added, stepping back and raising the lath which was the insignia of his functions as umpire.

The mistrust which he had shown had greatly irritated Marcas, who thought that he ought to have been differently treated by a Knight of Liberty. However, anger did not disturb Octavie's lover so far as to make him forget his usual tactics. The Count de Brouage had neither the tall stature nor the long limbs of the Swiss corporal ; still he was taller than his antagonist, and the first direct thrust which he made forced the student to recoil two or three paces. This sufficed to decide Marcas, now that he knew the length of René's arm, to resort to the tricks which had served him so well at the *King Clovis* tavern. Bending and gathering himself up together, he made himself so small that he offered but little surface to his antagonist's sword.

"A bad guard !" called out Jacques Arvert. "That's the 'Italian guard' that the 6th of the Line, all Neapolitans, used to make use of. It's forbidden."

"Why?" asked Marcas, between his teeth. "A man must fight in the best way he can."

The count said nothing, but changed his method. Instead of attacking, he simply defended himself, keeping Marcas off by feints, parrying properly, and being careful not to expose himself. However, he gained upon his adversary. Had this gone on, the student would have been driven against one of the cherry-trees ; but suddenly, at the very moment when René risked a lunge, he made a leap on one side, then a bound forward, which brought him almost hand-to-hand with his adversary, and he was now going to resort to the famous upward thrust which had more than once succeeded with him, when the irresistible lath came down upon his sword and turned it aside. Almost at the same moment, with the back of the wooden weapon he so dexterously handled, the old trooper raised the sword of M. de Brouage and threw himself between the antagonists.

"Little one," said he to Marcas, "I told you before that I wouldn't allow such tricks. You get as close to the ground as a toad ; that may pass ; but you have no right to fly in this gentleman's face like a cat."

"Go to the devil !" exclaimed the student, furiously. "Do you think that I'm going to allow myself to be taught ? Are we in a fencing-gallery, and fighting the wall, or are we trying to bleed one another ?"

"Bleed one another if you can ; but you've got to do it in a regular way. If you begin vaulting about while you have your sword in your hand, I will turn you out of the place, and escort this gentleman to Rochefort myself."

Marcas was wild with rage, and devoted the Knight of Liberty, who so openly took the count's part, to all the infernal deities. He promised himself that he would denounce him later on to the high *venta* ; but, meantime, he was forced to obey, for Jacques Arvert was not a man to be intimidated. So he said no more, but waited, grinding his teeth with fury, till the old soldier should again give the signal.

René, pale but calm, also waited and made up his mind to bring things at once to a close. He now saw that he had an irregular fighter to deal with, and one who had no scruple as to his mode of attack ; but he relied upon the worthy man, who had just saved his life, to stop all irregular thrusts ; and thought that he was a much better fencer than the student. He was not altogether wrong. Marcas did not fence according to rule. He parried rather badly, and often exposed himself, but he had an iron wrist and an astonishingly keen eye. He improvised thrusts that were as irregular as they were murderous, and made them with incredible swiftness and violence.

The Count de Brouage, on the contrary, fenced with method and certainty. In a gallery he would have touched ten times to his adversary's one. On the ground he lost something of his advantages, although he was coolly courageous, and had indomitable resolution. The veteran looked at the two adversaries, who were breathing hard, and clutching their swords with their teeth set and their eyes flashing, and he said to himself : "They would have made splendid soldiers in the 'other one's' time. And to think that they are fighting now about a petticoat. It really is a pity !"

He was right, for they looked superb, and had Octavie seen them thus fighting for her, she would have quivered with very pride. "Go on, now !" called out Jacques Arvert, raising his lath.

The swords met again, and the contest now assumed a different aspect. Marcas seemed to have entirely given up his favourite system. He had taken a proper position ; remained in his place instead of recoiling, and darting from right to left, and the thrusts which he made were according to rule. He did not expose his chest, and his attacks were prudent. René showed greater ardour. Feeling that he was protected from his foe's eccentric play by the veteran's authority, he wished to profit by the advantage which his knowledge of fencing gave him. He therefore began a series of thrusts, each of which was the mathematical consequence, so to say, of the one which had preceded it, and he left nothing to chance, never making a lunge without foreseeing the parry and thrust that would answer it. The student parried skilfully, but was not used to so scientific a method, and soon realised that with such play he must be the loser. He then regretted having underrated the skill of M. de Brouage, and perhaps repented also that he had not let the peasant Carbonari rid him of the troublesome royalist.

But the time for that had passed ; and besides, Marcas, sustained by the hatred he felt for his rival, neither desired nor was able to stop fighting. He held out, and began to seek an opportunity for one of the secret thrusts which he always held in reserve. However, it was René who first found such an opportunity. After an "extrication," so delicate that it might have been effected in the space of one of Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier's rings, the young count made a bold lunge, and touched his adversary's

shoulder. Unfortunately for him, his foot slipped at the moment when he was about to make a fresh thrust, and his sword, having left the line, he momentarily found himself unguarded.

Marcas did not yet feel the somewhat serious wound which he had received. He profited by the count's involuntary error to make a retort, and, with a lightning-like thrust, a straight one, he pierced his chest below the clavicle. René fell to the ground in a heap.

"Confound it!" exclaimed the old soldier, darting forward to raise him up, "I believe that you have killed him!"

"And you won't say this time that the thrust wasn't according to rule," sneered Marcas.

"No," replied Jacques Arvert, who was kneeling beside the count, "he isn't dead, but it's about the same thing. He is wounded in the lungs."

The veteran's diagnostic was right, for the lips of the wounded man were covered with bloody foam. "People live through such wounds all the same," he added, "and if he doesn't, it won't be any fault of mine. I will put him to bed, and take care of him myself. Help me to carry him over there."

"Don't you see that I am wounded myself?" replied the student.

"In the shoulder—that's nothing! You had a narrow escape, though. He fences better than you do, and he had you in his power, and if he hadn't slipped—on what?—ah! it was on a cherry that had fallen from the tree. You owe your life to that cherry. If I had foreseen that, you shouldn't have fought in the orchard. But one can't think of everything."

"Thanks for the interest you take in me," said Marcas, ironically. "You would have been better pleased if this royalist had killed me. On my return to Paris, I will tell those who have a right to know, all about your conduct."

In a second, Jacques Arvert was on his feet. "You threaten me, youngster, eh? Well, then, just learn that I am not afraid of you, or anything you can do. I am a Knight of Liberty, it is true, but the oath which I have taken does not oblige me to desert a wounded man, simply because he happens to be a noble. Besides, I warned you beforehand; the man whom you've damaged shall remain here, and no one shall touch him but myself—myself and the surgeon, whom you will send here, for you must clear away from here, do you hear? I'll bind up your little scratch and help you to put on your coat. Get on your grey mare, and when you arrive at Rochefort, go straight to the naval hospital and ask for Assistant Surgeon Saujon; you must tell him the whole story—he is one of us—and tell him that I shall expect him here this evening. He will dress your wound, and tell you where to find a lodging with people who won't try to find out why, or where, you got your sword-thrust. You understand me, eh?"

"Yes, but—"

"What more do you want? Do you think that I am going to spend my time chattering, while this brave fellow is, perhaps, at his last gasp?"

"Well, as you are so much interested in him, give me the letter which he wrote, and I will post it."

"None of that please. I promised to post it myself, and I shall keep my word."

"But—"

"But what? Don't you see that he is choking?"

"I have orders to find out what he writes. The leaders foresaw that he might write. They are afraid that he may denounce them."

"That isn't true. You are afraid that he wrote to the creature whom you have been fighting for. Well, then, to end the matter, I will show you the name which is on the address, but whether it is that of your lady-love or not, I assure you that the letter shall go, and that you sha'n't know its contents."

Having thus spoken, Jacques Arvert drew the letter which René had given him from his pocket, and showed the superscription to Marcas, who glanced at it, and exclaimed: "Good! I know what I wished to know. Let it go as soon as you like."

He was thinking to himself as he spoke: "He wrote to his cousin, then, before fighting, and Octavie declared that his cousin was very much in love with him. She said that Antoinette de Brouage was a woman whom love alone would kill; and she must be right, so by killing the count I have, perhaps, killed the marquis's daughter also."

"Come! come!" said the old soldier, "let me bind up your shoulder, and be off, as you are of no use here. I will put the wounded man to bed without your help, and I have a notion that the surgeon and I will patch him up somehow. What are you growling about? He is a nobleman, eh? I know that he belongs to our province Saintonge, like my friend Saujon and myself. So much the worse for you if we save him. You ought to have killed him more completely."

Meanwhile, René still lay prostrate upon the grass, and the blood slowly flowed from the wound in his breast, inflicted by Octavie's favoured lover.

XIII.

UNDER the very constitutional government of His Majesty Louis XVIII., France dreamed of all the liberties imaginable, and cared very little for those she had; aspiring to those which had been denied her. The Charter did not suffice, and the partisans of the ultra-authoritative rule of Napoleon I. were precisely those who protested the loudest against the very mild authority of the King. Liberty! that was the word on every lip, and all sorts of folks called themselves liberals, just as in '93 everybody called themselves patriots.

However, the freedom of the theatres, decreed by the Assemblée Constituante, on the 13th of January, 1790, and revoked without ceremony on June 8th, 1806, had not been asked for again. The Emperor had gone very far in his restrictions. In 1807, he had closed all the small theatres in Paris, leaving but eight open, and these were forced to perform only certain kinds of plays. All the managers, after obtaining the first authorisation, had to prove that they had a certain amount of capital, and give security. The refusal of an authorisation to open a theatre could not be appealed from, and a company of players could not change their theatre without the permission of the Minister of the Interior. In 1821, these regulations were still in full vigour, and no one objected to them, or at least they were not openly attacked. There was merely a certain amount of criticism anent the dramatic censorship then in the hands of Lemontey, Lacretelle, and D'Avrigny.

The Censorship was not an invention of the king's government, however, for it had never worked more vigorously than under the Republic. The

terrorist censors forbade the performance of almost all the plays of Molière, Regnard's *Gamester*, Marivaux's *Love and Chance*, and a great many other masterpieces. They forbade Voltaire's *Mahomet*, under pretext that Mahomet had been the leader of a party, and exacted that *William Tell*, by Lemierre, should bear the charming title of *The Swiss Sans-culottes*. It is true that they allowed immoral plays to be performed, and impious ones also. Under the Empire all plays with a republican or royalist tendency were pitilessly proscribed, such as *Brutus*, and *Edward in Scotland*; while, on the other hand, the censorship of the Restoration forbade all allusions to Napoleon, and Arnault's tragedy of *Germanicus*, which was full of references to the Empire, had but one performance, for ever famous on account of the fray which took place in the pit at the Théâtre Français. It is from that memorable evening that date the regulations forcing spectators to leave their canes in the lobby. Under Charles X. the censors who were partisans of the classical school made a fierce war upon plays of the modern kind; but in 1821 the "romantic school" did not yet exist, and a great deal of liberty was allowed to the playwrights then in fashion, conspicuous among whom were Gilbert de Pixérécourt, who had just successfully produced *Mont-Sauvage*, a melodrama taken from the *Solitaire*; and the celebrated Caignez, the applauded author of the *Thieving Magpie, or the servant girl of Palaiseau*, and the *Accusing Rooks, or the Forest of Cercottes*. Moreover, the authorities did not make any difficulty about giving licences to those who started as managers, and Paris had many more theatres than under the Empire. The Gymnase, which was destined to be called the Théâtre de Madame a little later on, had been opened on the 2nd of December, 1820, on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, where it still stands. Less aristocratic, and fated to have a shorter life—for it enjoyed but two years' existence—the Panorama Dramatique had been opened on the 5th of April, 1821, and at the date of which we write it was highly prosperous. Drama, melodrama, comedy, vaudeville, and ballet, in fact, everything but tragedy was played there; the pieces were received by a committee, among whom figured Charles Nodier and Baron Taylor, and they were played by a company of superior actors. Bouffé was there with Mesdames Mariany, Lili Bourgoïn, and Florville—pretty women of those days, who have now gone where the snows of winter go.

This theatre had been built on the noted Boulevard du Temple, which was already called the Boulevard du Crime, on account of the incalculable number of crimes which were perpetrated every evening upon three or four different stages given up to melodrama. It is not necessary to be very old to remember that gay corner of bygone Paris, that joyous gathering of theatres, restaurants, and cafés, which were demolished in 1862 to make room for the Boulevard Voltaire. Under the Restoration the Boulevard du Temple was still in all its glory. Interminable crowds poured every evening from the doors of the theatres, vendors of oranges and apple-puffs plied a brisk trade, and from the beginning to the end of the year a fair was held there.

Nicolet and his monkey no longer displayed themselves, but Bobèche and his associate Galimafré drew crowds to their platforms in front of the entrance of the Petit Lazari—Bobèche, the "king of farce," who had sneered at tyranny under the Empire, and who, in spite of his liberal opinions, was called on the posters the "government buffoon." Theatre goers had only to choose among the five or six playhouses adjoining one another. The hot summer weather did not discourage them, and a few days after the depar-

ture of René de Brouage for La Rochelle, one not June evening a crowd filled the new theatre, the Panorama Dramatique, attracted by a piece called *Ogier the Dane, or the Temple of Death*, and also by a rumour that the liberals and Bonapartists would meet there that night to hiss certain passages of this play, and that several royalist officers meant to silence them. A fray was looked for, or at all events a great stir, and the public was then very fond of these interludes which did not appear on the bill.

To tell the truth, one had to be prejudiced to find anything that related to the return of the Bourbons or the French Revolution in the stilted dialogue of this play. The author had taken his subject from a *chanson du geste* of the twelfth century, but he had chosen to make Ogier, one of Charlemagne's knights, a kind of Monk, who re-establishes upon the throne of Denmark the son of a legitimate king, previously murdered by an English traitor. This sufficed for people to look upon the imaginary Ogier as the personification of the *émigrés* restoring the monarchy, while the traitor Seward was supposed to picture the conventional regicides.

Parties were always ready when a chance offered for a fierce quarrel, and they had eagerly seized upon the present pretext for a regular encounter. The royal guardsmen had retained a great many stalls; the Carbonari had secured the pit and dress circle; the students of the different schools had sent their best bench-breakers, and people of the middle classes, who feared blows, but delighted seeing other people struck, had taken possession of the boxes.

Journalists were scattered through the building. Bernaville, of the *White Flag*, had seated himself in the stalls, as near the pit as possible, and within reach of the enemy, for he was brave and had already fought more than one duel on account of his opinions. He was not very far from his royalist friends, but chance had placed him in the midst of a group of the ex-officers of the Empire, and at the very side of Colonel Fournès.

The druggist Boulardot was enthroned in the gallery, in the uniform of a corporal of the national guard, flanked by his wife and his "presumptive heir," whom he had attired as an artilleryman, and whom he had brought to see the sight, so that he might grow accustomed to excitement at an early age. Loquetières was in a stage-box paid for by the police, who wished to have an eye upon the disorderly scenes about to take place; and, the detective, ever gallant, had profited of the opportunity to invite Saint-Héliér and his charming daughter. The chevalier and the divine Octavie sat in the front of the box, while, through courtesy, or, perhaps, so as to be less conspicuous, Sartine's pupil had seated himself at the back.

No one paid any attention to him, although he looked at one and all, but the golden-haired beauty attracted every eye. She was noted for her charms throughout Paris, and whenever she appeared at the theatre it was almost an event, especially as she had seldom been seen in public during the last few months. Every glass was turned her way. The men declared her to be "adorable," "marvellous," and "irresistible;" the women criticised her plain dress, and her attitude which they declared was very affected. The truth was that in her black plaited dress, with her hair gathered up in massive coils, in the antique fashion, Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér looked like a Grecian statue. And, as though to complete the illusion, her beautiful features, paler and less animated than usual, had the whiteness and the calm repose of marble.

After looking about the house for an instant, as if in search of some one, her eyes seemed to stare into vacancy. She seemed thoughtful, and more

than one of the young men who admired her from afar said to himself, enviously : " She is thinking of the fellow she loves."

Loquetières, who was discreetly hidden at the back of the box, flattered himself that she was thinking over the proposal of marriage which he had renewed on the evening before to her father, to whom he had already spoken on more than one occasion of his wish to make Octavie his wife. Saint-Hélier was foolishly flattering himself that she was reflecting on the talk which had taken place between them before coming to the theatre, and was meditating a fable of La Fontaine, the first line of which he had ventured to quote to her : " A certain maid, somewhat too proud—" Young and old were wrong, however, all of them, for Octavie was calculating how many days had elapsed since Marcas had left Paris, and wondering why he had not written to her.

Meantime the theatre was rapidly filling. The only unoccupied seats were those of a box situated next to that in which Loquetières and his friends were located. The footlights were being lighted, for the *Panorama Dramatique* was illuminated by oil ; the orchestra was about to play the overture, and murmurs which foretold the coming disturbance were already to be heard in the pit. The appearance of an auditorium in those days, when there was so little light and no gilding, hangings, or even stools for ladies' feet to rest on—such as are now in use in all Parisian theatres—is nowadays hard to imagine. The chandelier threw some light upon the upper boxes, but it scarcely lit the pit at all, and the corner boxes were quite in the dark. The footlights cast but a feeble glow upon the faces of the actresses, who did not complain, however, as not being particularly beautiful, they did not care to appear in a full glare of illumination.

After all, the masterpieces of the " great century " were played by candle-light, and there had certainly been some progress made since the first performance of Molière's *Tartuffe*. Three raps having resounded, the orchestra played an overture suited to the gloomy plot of the piece about to be performed, an overture in which bassoons and double-basses had the upper-hand ; the curtain going up, while one musician whacked away at the big drum.

The scene was an ancient forest with the ruins of a monastery in the rear, and a cottage in the foreground. The sounds of a horn announced the coming of a knight, and Ogier appeared in a costume which was by no means Danish, for it consisted of a currant-coloured tunic, a cap with a white feather, buff armlets and tin knee-caps. The valiant knight was in undress, but his squires were fully equipped, and he addressed them in earnest terms, deploring the misfortunes of the King of Denmark, who had been driven by an usurper from his throne, and was obliged to languish in a foreign land till his subjects fetched him back.

This statement of the King of Denmark's affairs was hailed with ironical laughter, and also with applause. The laughter got the better hand, however, and it became evident that " opposition " prevailed.

At the moment when the shrieks of a young girl attacked by some robbers resounded behind the scenes, the door of the unoccupied box, next to that where the Saint-Héliers were seated, was quietly opened, and two women entered it. One of them wore a kind of hood, of some white material, which she threw back as soon as she was seated, and if the spectators had been less taken up with what was transpiring on the stage, there would have been a great stir in the house, for it would have been discovered that the " Woman with the death's head " was present.

It was indeed Cecilia d'Ascoli, accompanied by the faithful maid whom Orso had left with her. She leaned upon the front of the box, and remained motionless and silent for a moment. "He is not here," she said at last, in a tone of sadness.

"He will come, madame," replied Teresa.

"No, no, he will not come," replied Cecilia; "my feelings never deceive me. Something tells me that I shall go away in despair again this time. But the newspapers say that a demonstration will be made against the Government to-night; the brethren of the Coral Pin will no doubt be here—I trusted that he would be among them."

"You know, dear mistress, that he is obliged to be on his guard."

"Yes," said the young woman, bitterly, "he must be, and he is so; for three months he has not given a moment to me, although he says that he loves me."

"His enemies are watching him. If he came to your house, he would be followed, and we should all be lost."

"Ah! would to Heaven that I were indeed arrested, or even taken to the scaffold. I should at least be rid of the horrible life I lead."

"Oh! my dear mistress, don't, I entreat you, call down misfortune upon your own head. If Heaven listened to you—"

"Heaven does not listen to me. I nightly pray that my sufferings may end, but I suffer more and more. I am not able to struggle any longer, Teresa. You say that Orso would risk his life by visiting me—you are doubtless right, and I should even be resigned if I could but see him. It seems to me that my grief would lessen if I could merely catch a glimpse of him in this theatre. What keeps him away? What prevents him from showing himself where I am? He knows that I go out; it was he who advised me to show myself; and yet, when he might console me with a look or gesture, he takes all possible pains to keep out of my way, and absolutely flies from me."

"But, my dear mistress, don't you see that he fears that his emotion at sight of you would betray him? Would you be able, if you saw him, to restrain yourself from approaching him?"

"Yes, I should control myself. I would govern the impulses of my heart. You have forgotten that one day when he was wandering about in the mountains, disguised as a wood-cutter, he was arrested by Fernando's sbirri, who suspected him of being the leader of the Carbouari, and took him to Lanciano. I was there, I saw him pass by, bound like a criminal, and yet I did not make the slightest motion, or did my face change, for I knew that if I recognised him, it would cost him his life. He knows that I did not give way on that dreadful occasion, and yet he neither shows himself where I am, nor even writes to me."

"Write? ah! madame, that would be very imprudent indeed. It is said that all the letters are opened by Government spies."

"What obliges him to write to me by post? He, who has so many followers about him, followers who blindly obey him, could surely find a trustworthy messenger. He succeeded in sending me the note which induced me to go to the Tivoli Gardens to meet him. Ah! I had a whole day of happiness and hope, but I paid dearly for it, for he did not come after all."

"The note was not in his handwriting, madame, and perhaps it did not come from him at all."

"Who could have written it then?" demanded Cecilia, cagerly. "You

don't reply; you think, as I do, that he no longer loves me, and you dare not own what you think. Besides, how could he love me now that I have disfigured myself?"

Teresa remained silent. She was in tears.

"No, he does not love me now," continued Cecilia. "If he did he would brave everything. Does any one reason when in love? Did I reason when, upon a word from him—he said that my beauty was 'fatal'—I destroyed the face he had worshipped? Why didn't I foresee that the sacrifice would destroy his love?"

"Ah, mistress! if you would only listen to me, the traces of the poisonous lotion might perhaps be removed. Luigi tells me that he knows a secret for—"

"Say no more! No one while I live shall ever see my face. I alone know what I underwent on showing it to that physician who came to see me, for I am a woman and have a woman's feelings, after all, and when I stand before a glass with this black mask over my face, I feel afraid of myself; yes, afraid, and if I took it off, if I dared to look at myself, I should expire with shame and horror. But it conceals my face very well," added the young woman, in a bitter tone, "and Orso need never fear that any one would perceive my emotion at sight of him. These Frenchmen all call me the 'woman with the death's head,' and they are right. My face is a dead face, my heart alone is alive. Would that it were not, would that I were in the grave!"

"Oh! madame, don't despair, I entreat you. The prince has not changed, I am sure that he suffers as much as you do and curses the obstacles that part you."

"Obstacles are nothing to him. At Lanciano when he really loved me, he risked his life over and over again to spend an hour with me."

"But this is not Lanciano."

"What does that matter? In Paris the peril is no greater; it is less even, for the Carbonari are stronger than they were, when the Association merely comprised the poor foresters of the Abruzzi. Even were Orso arrested, the Association would not be destroyed. He alone would be in danger if he ventured to come and see me, and he has always despised danger, and has never trembled for himself."

"It is for you he trembles."

"For me? Ah! if I could only believe that! But no! he knows my heart, he knows that I am willing to share his misfortunes. He is well aware that on the fatal night when I voluntarily sacrificed my beauty to his interests, he accepted the sacrifice when he might have forced me to go away. You were not there, you are ignorant of what transpired between us, you did not hear the vows which he made, the projects which he formed. I will tell you everything, for all the particulars are still fresh in my mind. Orso wished to send me with Francesca to the château, where the treasure of the Carbonari is deposited—the money belonging to the Association of the Coral Pin. But I refused to leave Paris, I proposed to him to disfigure my face and cover it with a mask which I would never remove. He refused at first, then little by little he told me what to do to make such a life bearable. He told me that you and Gennaro would remain in my service; that for a month we should continue to live in the Rue de Rocher, where I had been so happy, but that he would not be able to see me during that month, because the disappearance of the baroness and her niece would induce the police to watch him; however, when we were installed in the

house which he was going to take for me, it would not be the same. I remember his very words: 'You will not need to live in a mysterious manner. I will plan everything for you, and when the stir is over and the police are no longer on the lookout, I will come as I used to do, every night.' Those were his very words, and I am still waiting for him, but I never see him. Ah! I shall see him no more!"

"If he did not intend to return, my dear mistress, he would not condemn you to the mournful existence that you now lead, he would not have promised that you should resume your former life. The Prince of Catanzaro has never spoken falsely."

"He did not think that he did speak falsely when he swore all this to me. He believed that he would keep his promises, and that his love would last; but it is not so. I deceived myself. I flattered myself that the remembrance of my lost beauty would live forever in his mind, and that that recollection would suffice. But we were both wrong. The Cecilia whom he worshipped is no more. He would ever see my hideous face in his imagination; the scars of my horrible ugliness would seem visible to him through my black mask. Ah! he will never have the courage to come where I am. I should seem to him to be a ghost, and that is all that I now am. You see, Teresa, it would be better if I were dead!"

The companion only replied by a deep sigh, so deep indeed that Saint-Hélier took upon himself to reply to it by a loud "Hush!" The good chevalier was greatly interested in the fate of a persecuted beauty whom Ogier, the Dane, had now just wrested from the robbers of the old forest, and the conversation in the next box prevented him from hearing the sentimental dialogue on the stage. Cecilia leaned somewhat forward to see who the person who cried "Hush" could be. In doing so she caught sight of Saint-Hélier's profile, and found herself face to face with Octavie, who was leaning against the partition, between the two boxes.

It would be difficult to tell which of the two women received the strongest impression. Octavie had previously seen the masked stranger about whom all Paris was talking. This was at the Tivoli Gardens, but she had not expected to meet her at the theatre. The sight of the mask now made her almost feel afraid, and she quickly drew back. Cecilia, on her side, had never seen Mlle. de Saint-Hélier. Her eyes were dazzled by the splendour of Octavie's loveliness, and her heart sank. "How greatly that woman must be loved!" muttered the poor, disfigured creature, as she sat back again.

Meanwhile Loquetières, who was standing up at the rear of the box, had plainly seen the woman with the death's-head. He had previously occupied himself about her, and it was at his instigation that the police had required her to show her face to Dr. Verdon. The latter, however, on being expressly sent to visit her, had declared in his report that her disfigurement actually existed, so that Loquetières had troubled himself no more about the matter. He had the less suspicion of her, as the spies who prowled about the house which she had hired in the Faubourg du Roule, had declared that she lived in an open, quiet style. However, for some reason he was unconscious of, he had felt his mistrust revive as soon as she had entered the box next to his own; indeed, before he even realised that she was with another woman, and that they were talking together instead of attending to the play. On noting that point, however, he began to listen with his ear close to the partition, and found that the two women were conversing in Italian. This was enough to excite his curiosity. Old police spies have

certain intuitive feelings. Unfortunately, Loquetières did not speak Italian, and only understood a word of the talk here and there. Octavie, on her side, did not speak it either, but she understood it tolerably well; however, she had not paid the least attention either to what was being said in the adjoining box, or to what was being said on the stage. Her mind at the moment was far indeed from the *Panorama Dramatique*.

Cecilia's confidential communications to her faithful companion were, therefore, not understood by those who might have made a bad use of them. She became silent as soon as she found that she had attracted attention, and the chevalier followed at his ease the various episodes of the play.

The valiant Ogier having left the stage after rescuing the damsel from the murderous robbers, Seward, the villain of the piece, made his appearance amid low music, played by the orchestra. Hidden in the hollow trunk of an ancient oak, Seward had listened to the discourse of the knight, who made it his business to protect the fair and reinstate unlucky kings upon their thrones. And Seward, now that the Dane and his escort had turned upon their heels, was making fun of them. He held forth boldly against all the tyrants who "from the cradle up" took upon themselves to govern nations; and he railed against the vain superstitions kept up by the priests of the Scandinavian faith. This antique "free-thinker" more particularly derided a certain belief current in the country—a belief in an all-devouring statue, placed, so said the legend, in the famous Temple of Death. This statue and temple were the main attractions of the play: to represent them properly, at the last act, the management had gone to great expense, and the stage machinists had surpassed themselves. A few worthy citizens present had simply come for the purpose of seeing this wonderful mechanical effect, but the majority of the spectators had come to create a disturbance, and the noise began as soon as Seward started on his soliloquy.

"Hold your tongue, you Jacobin!" called out a royalist, an old officer in Condé's army.

"Hold your tongue, you emigrationist!"

"Put out that sharp-shooter of Louis the Fourteenth!"

These cries from the pit found no echo in the body of the house, however, and the actor was allowed to finish his speech against the Danish "legitimate" government. This was but a skirmish, and the members of both camps were reserving themselves for the final scenes, which were said to be full of political allusions.

The curtain fell amid applause and hissing, and quiet was soon restored. The dandies in the stalls now turned towards the house and began ogling all the pretty women. At that time the boxes were provided with gratings which could be raised or lowered at pleasure. Cecilia, who did not yet despair of seeing Orso, still remained in her seat, but she now raised the grating of her box in order that she might be able to watch for her husband without being seen by the audience.

XIV.

THE *Panorama Dramatique* boasted a lounge. It was the only theatre of the Boulevard du Crime where the spectators could walk up and down between the acts in a comfortable place. The other houses merely gave the audience a choice between walking about in inconvenient passages and breathing the open air on the esplanade where *Bolèche* was holding forth.

The public at that time were not hard to please, and no one complained of the manner in which managers imposed upon their audiences. Providing people saw the play they were satisfied, they did not complain of the narrowness of the exits or the hardness of the benches. But the managers of the Panorama Dramatique were men of progress, who did not shrink from expense. They had gone so far as to place several arm-chairs upholstered in Utrecht velvet in the lounge—which they called a saloon—and they had put "*Ogier the Dane*" upon the stage in the most lavish style. No wonder, therefore, that they failed two years after. However, they were still very prosperous on the evening in question, and expected brilliant results, for all Paris seemed to have met at their establishment.

The curtain had just fallen on the first act of the melodrama, and there was a crowd in the famous "saloon," a select crowd, composed of men of the world and writers, simple cits preferring to go to regale themselves outside with beer and tarts. Bernaville, leaning against the mantelpiece with two or three reporters of the *White Flag* beside him, was holding forth anent the play, and consequently talking politics, shooting poisoned arrows at the liberals, and even mocking the royalist "old fogies." "You say that this melodrama is silly," said he to a writer of the opposition side; "I grant you that, but I'll bet that if the authors were on your side you would declare it to be admirable. What have you to say against these worthy dishers-up of legendary lore? That they have created a fancy Ogier? Well, your writers try to make us believe that there was something good in Robespierre, and that Saint-Just was a great man. Is it their style that you object to? I confess that they don't write like La Bruyère; but Béranger, whom you call 'the national poet,' writes like a dunce."

There was a murmur of dissent at this, even among the critics of the government papers, for the song-writer had admirers on all sides.

"Shall I prove what I say?" resumed Bernaville. "Well, just listen to these pretty lines :

" 'Perchance it sleeps, the ball invincible
Which crushed a score of thrones at one fell blow,
But may it not, awaking terrible,
Light on the heads of kings and stretch them low? "

"Why, that is splendid!" exclaimed an old pamphleteer who, no doubt, had formerly been upon the staff of the *Minerva*, a classical, liberal and very stupid review.

"You think so? Will you be kind enough, then, to tell me what it all means? The ball, I understand very well, is the Revolution. But did you ever see a ball 'sleep' and then 'wake up' and strike people on the head? 'On the head' is masterly, it is indeed!"

"Let us go, Madame Boulardot," said the corporal of the 6th Legion to his wife. "This man is insulting every glory. If I listened any longer I should do something desperate, I know that I could not stand it." Thereupon, the patriotic druggist went off, after darting a fiery glance at Bernaville.

However the incorrigible journalist continued: "Ask Colonel Fournès what he thinks of that cannon ball. He knows what cannon balls are."

The colonel, who, while sauntering about, had by chance come near the mantelpiece, heard this remark, but took no notice of it. He had sworn to himself that he would be prudent, and was by no means inclined to indulge in a public discussion with the editor of the *White Flag*. Besides, at

the other end of the saloon he had just seen a friend to whom he wished to speak. So he turned his back upon Bernaville, who did not continue his sarcastic remarks, for he had much greater esteem for the colonel than for the liberal citizens whom he loved to ridicule.

At this moment the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier came up with his daughter on his arm, and Bernaville took a few steps to meet them. The bitter journalist was a fervent admirer of Octavie's beauty, and never failed to pay his respects to the wonderful creature whenever a chance occurred. As a rule she did not receive him badly, although she was perfectly indifferent to his attentions. His wit amused her, however, and through him she learned all the fresh news. That evening she was more gracious than usual, for there was something she wished to ask him.

"It is a great treat to see you at the theatre, mademoiselle," said Bernaville, "and I am truly grateful to your father for departing from his habits of seclusion. He keeps you in retirement at the Place Royale, and one never sees you."

"I don't care for society or theatricals," replied Octavie. "I willingly live in seclusion, and I only came to-night to see this stupid play to oblige Monsieur des Loquetières."

"Ah, he is here, then, our worthy Loquetières?"

"Yes, he was kind enough to offer us seats," said Saint-Hélier.

"And he came here with you, no doubt. I shall be delighted to see him. We have not met for an age. How is it that he isn't with you?"

"He stayed behind in the box."

"Well, he can't be as gallant as usual, then; but you will allow me, I hope, to take his place, and offer you some refreshment? The ices here are as good as at Torton's."

It should be mentioned that the managers of the new theatre had engaged a confectioner, which in those days was considered the height of luxury, for most people contented themselves with lemonade or cider. Octavie accepted the invitation, and the chevalier did not require urging to accompany Bernaville, who conducted them to the other end of the saloon, where a throng was collected about a counter. The ices were served, and proved excellent, and Octavie while partaking of hers said to the editor: "I think that our friend Loquetières had his reasons for staying behind. The box next to ours is occupied by a person in whom he is very greatly interested."

"Is it a lady?" asked Bernaville. "It would be unpardonable on his part to desert you for another woman."

"She is a young unmarried lady, and I can't tell you how many millions she has. It is quite natural, however. He is free to marry, and the young lady in question is on the lookout for a husband."

"Are you alluding to the masked woman whom people talk about so much?"

"Exactly. I just now saw her face to face, and that black mask with her eyes shining through the holes is truly frightful."

"And yet you think that Loquetières is going to make up to her?" exclaimed the editor with a laugh.

"Who knows?"

"Well, I think that there is but little chance of his being successful; he is over forty, now, and even when he was young, between ourselves, he was no Apollo."

"Loquetières isn't a youth, of course," growled the chevalier, "but he is still very good-looking, and he is a man of merit."

"It seems to me that a woman with a death's head ought not to be very hard to please," remarked Octavie.

"So you believe then in this story invented by my brother journalists of the *Constitutionnel*?" said Bernaville in a mocking tone.

"They exaggerated perhaps, but the unfortunate woman is certainly horribly ugly. If her face were not hideous, she wouldn't take so much pains to hide it."

"Well, I have another idea about the matter. An idea I have borrowed from Perrault's fairy tales. Don't you remember the old fairy who was looking for a young man courageous enough to take her for a wife? She finds him, you remember, and after the wedding rewards him by appearing in her true form as a charming princess."

"Then you think that this mask—"

"Perhaps covers a lovely face."

"Why does she wear it then?"

"To put her admirers to the proof, of course! She wishes to be loved for her good qualities, not for her beauty."

"She runs a great risk of being merely loved for her money."

"I confess that I am of your opinion, and I wish Loquetières good luck. But I greatly doubt his being able to make love through the partition which separates his box from hers, and all the more as this person has some one with her, no doubt?"

"She has another woman with her, her 'companion,' I suppose. They were talking in Italian."

"In Italian? Ah! Loquetières does not know a word of that language. It will be very annoying if he attempts to express his passion. However," added Bernaville, all at once, "you have a young man at your house, chevalier, who would be better suited to make advances, your secretary I mean, Victorin Marcas: he is young, intelligent and ambitious. What has he been doing of late? I never see him nowadays."

"He asked for a leave of absence to go to see his father, who lives near Montauban," replied Saint-Hélier.

"True, he is a native of Gascony; just the very man to try for the lady! It needs courage and quickness of mind."

"You think that he would marry her for her millions in spite of her death's-head?"

"I don't doubt it, and if he were in your box to-night he would, I'm sure, take the advantage of the opportunity to introduce himself to your neighbour."

"But he isn't here," muttered Octavie de Saint-Hélier, who had listened attentively to Bernaville, especially while he was speaking of Marcas.

"He will return, however, and the first time that I see him I will put it into his head to make up to the masked lady," said the editor, laughing. "However, he may not be disposed to listen to me, for he has been dabbling in opposition politics, I believe, lately, and he knows my royalist opinions. Do you know, my dear chevalier, that I often met him, last winter, at the house of that adventuress the Baroness de Casanova, who, they say, was conspiring against the government, and who vanished one fine day with her niece?"

"My secretary made a bad choice in choosing such people as his associates," replied Saint-Hélier.

"Oh! don't say too much against those women. I think that they had something to do with the Carbonari, but they were charming, and several

very agreeable people were to be met at their house. Loquetières went there, I remember, and that young man whom you can see over there talking with Colonel Fournès, used to go there every evening."

"Isn't he the Viscount de Brouage?" said Octavie, trying to look unconcerned.

"Viscount Fabien? Yes, mademoiselle, and he is a gentleman of a very wrong way of thinking, the brother of Count René, who, on the contrary, has very sensible views. You know him, don't you?"

"He is the first cousin of that Count de Brouage, who was killed three months ago in so mysterious a manner," said the worthy chevalier with a sigh.

"Well! it looks as though the Brouage family had a spell upon it," said Bernaville. "The general has quarrelled with his nephews, I hear; he has lost his son, and now there is a report that his daughter—"

"What about his daughter?" interrupted Octavie.

"It is said—but I don't believe it—however, it is said that Mademoiselle de Brouage has disappeared, that she has not been seen since yesterday."

"What! has she been killed too?" exclaimed Saint-Hélier.

"No, that isn't it. It is stated that she has gone away with an English governess who has been bringing her up pretty badly, it would seem."

"That's strange!" muttered Octavie.

"Such things are not uncommon in England," said Bernaville, in a philosophical tone.

"The cause of this strange disappearance isn't known then?"

"No, but there are conjectures on the subject. She has been crossed in love no doubt. The general was very inflexible in such matters. His daughter seems to have rebelled and he is furious, they say."

Octavie said nothing, but the journalist's remarks had greatly disturbed her, and he saw that such was the case, and felt somewhat surprised. However, he added, with a touch of malice: "Who knows whether the two cousins haven't something to do with this caper? See, the one who is here has suddenly taken leave of Fournès and is hastily leaving the saloon! The interval between the acts is far from being over, perhaps on account of the scenery; there must be another half hour yet, at the least. Where is the viscount going, I wonder? Don't you think that he looks as though he were going to meet his lady-love?"

Fabien de Brouage had, in fact, left the saloon, where he had stayed but a moment. He had come to the Panorama-Dramatique in obedience to an order from the central *venta*, and had there found Colonel Fournès, who never missed a chance of warming the zeal of the Carbonari. However, a somewhat brief conversation with the colonel had ended in Fabien's hastily taking the passage on the right, which he went down, counting the box doors till he reached the ninth one. He knew by the number that this door must be that of the box he was in search of. There was no one to speak to in the passage, and he did not care to ask for information as to the person he was looking for. Besides, box-openers were scarce in those days, and hard to find when wanted.

Fabien did not attach any great importance to the orders in obedience to which he had come to the Panorama-Dramatique. On his arrival he had placed himself in one corner of the stalls, and instead of paying any attention to the play and taking a part in the demonstration, he had been gazing about the theatre all the time while the first act lasted. Since his visit to Tivoli Gardens, he had been in search of a certain person, whom he had

sought in vain. Chance now favoured him, however, for while he was examining the boxes through his glasses, he suddenly espied the masked lady. He was greatly startled, for it was the first time that he had seen Stella Negrone since he had caught so slight a glimpse of her in the magician's cave. He had had sufficient command of himself not to go to her house, although he perfectly well knew where she lived. It was not, however, that he cared much for Orso's threats, or thought himself in any way bound to stand aside for him.

The leader of the Society of the Coral Pin had tried to extort a promise from the Viscount de Brouage, a promise which the viscount had not refused to make, but which he had avoided making; and things had remained as they were before. Fabien feared no one, and he was all the more able to brave Don Hernandez as the latter by keeping Stella Negrone still in Paris exposed himself to great censure from the high *venta*. If Fabien had abstained from calling upon the Italian woman, it was because, in the magician's cave, she had entreated him not to follow her; moreover, she had held out her hand to him and he had covered it with kisses, and she had shown genuine emotion when he had sworn that he loved her for herself, not for her beauty. Now he hoped that in the solitude in which she was left by Orso, she would be moved by the remembrance of this scene, and think of the man whose only request was that his love for her might be put to the proof. Understanding that any premature step would ruin that hope, he had contented himself with passing frequently in front of Stella's residence. He had no trouble in discovering the house, which was at the upper end of the Faubourg du Roule, for all the neighbourhood was chattering about the woman with the death's-head. However, people were beginning to grow accustomed to the phenomenon, for the foreign lady led the quietest life imaginable, receiving such indiscreet persons as presented themselves as suitors for her money's sake with great coldness, and dismissing them if they became annoying. She had sent a letter to the papers in which she stated that the amount of her fortune had been greatly exaggerated, and that she had not come to Paris to find a husband, but simply to enjoy an independent life, such as she could not enjoy in her own country.

A single maid and man-servant waited upon her, and she did not keep a carriage. The house which she had taken was not a palace by any means. Standing in an almost deserted suburb between court and garden, it must formerly have served some nobleman, or farmer general, as an occasional retreat. Now the enamoured viscount who had examined all the approaches had said to himself that it would be by no means difficult to enter the place without the knowledge of the owner. But he was resigned to wait, and waited. He had abstained from telling the truth to Colonel Fournès, after the latter had bidden him follow the masked woman at Tivoli, and find out all about her. Naturally enough, Fabien did not wish that the high *venta* should force Stella to leave Paris. Reassured by Fabien's report, the colonel had already forgotten his first suspicions, and no longer busied himself about the lady with the death's-head.

At the Panorama, no one had seen her in the box excepting Octavie and M. de Brouage, who had said nothing as to her presence there. She had shown herself but for an instant, and having raised the grating when the curtain fell, the audience could not see her during the interval between the acts. Fabien had thus a good opportunity to join her, but he was annoyed by the proximity of some persons whom he did not wish to meet. He had

recognised Saint-Hélier and his daughter a moment before, and he hesitated about going to see Stella. At last, however, he saw Octavie and the chevalier leave their box and at once decided that the opportunity was a good one for speaking to Stella without fear of being listened to.

The box on the left of Stella's was occupied by a family of quiet people whose attention was concentrated upon the performance, and Fabien imagined that the box on the right, which M. and Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier had vacated for the time being, was now quite unoccupied. From his own seat in the stalls he had not caught sight of Loquetières, who kept himself at the back.

The Viscount de Brouage had not a moment to lose to take advantage of the good opportunity now offered to him by chance. He rapidly glanced at the boxes, and saw that Stella's was the ninth one of the tier. Sure of the accuracy of his glance, he left his seat, ran up the stairs as swiftly as he could, passed quickly before the saloon where he was detained for half a minute by Colonel Fournès, and then darted along the passage he was in search of. He found no one there, and was able at his ease to count the ninth box from the stage.

When he had found it—and it did not require much time to do so—he hesitated, for he feared that in thus surprising Stella Negroni he might alarm her. Might she not involuntarily utter an exclamation on seeing him, an exclamation that might be heard by the idlers among the audience? Did he not risk compromising her? Love conquered caution, however. He knocked as softly as he could. The door opened at once, as though the knock had been waited for, and Fabien went in, so as not to give Stella the time to change her mind. She was alone. "It is I, the Viscount de Brouage," he said in a low tone.

He was obliged to mention his name, for the grating made the box very dim.

"You!" exclaimed Stella, "you here! You promised me not to try to see me again. What have you come here for?"

"To tell you that I adore you and cannot live without you."

"Cease speaking to me like that; I must not listen to you."

"Why should I cease speaking to you? Why shouldn't you listen to me? Are you to be forever the slave of the man who has sacrificed you to his jealousy? Didn't you say to me, 'If I were sure he had deserted me, I would revenge myself?' You spoke those words in the Tivoli Gardens, where he had ordered you to meet him, but where he did not appear. Have you seen him since? Has he let you know that he is thinking of you? You do not reply. It is true, then? He has deserted you! His treachery leaves you free!"

"Do not slander him," said the young woman, who had scarcely the courage to protest.

Fabien, by thus impetuously rushing on with his declaration of love had, at the first assault, made an impression upon the poor woman, whose mind was disturbed by waiting, uncertainty, and grief. A lover's natural instinct now inspired him still better, for he used precisely the same arguments as Cecilia d'Ascoli had employed to convince Teresa of Orso's unfaithfulness. "What keeps him away?" he exclaimed. "No one suspects you, and he has never been suspected. What does he fear, a man so brave that he boasts fearing nothing? Ah, he fears again beholding a woman whom he coldly and pitilessly condemned to the most horrible fate

that can be devised for one of your sex. He never loved aught but your beauty."

"I pardon him," stammered Stella; "who would have the courage to love me now?"

"I would! I have told you already that I long to be put to the proof. I again entreat you to remove the mask you wear, and to let me see your face."

"Never!" replied Stella, with a shudder.

"I swear to you upon my love," resumed Fabien, with a burst of passion which touched the heart of the Italian, "upon my honour as a gentleman, that to me you will always seem lovely."

"Do not swear what! You dream of an impossibility. If I consented to what you ask, I could only die after granting your wish, for my last illusion would depart. Spare me such shame and grief."

"Ah! I understand you. It is for yourself that you fear the test; you do not wish to show yourself in the condition to which your merciless tyrant has reduced you. Well, if I couldn't see you, if I were blind, what then? Burn out my eyes with the poisonous lotion that has disfigured you, and be mine!"

Cecilia started, and replied in a stifled voice: "Say no more! I believe you, I believe that you love me, but I cannot love you."

"Do you know what I have come here to propose to you? I have come to ask you to fly with me. Oh! don't fear that I shall force myself upon you. If you consent to go with me, it will be the beginning of a test to which I agree to submit, beforehand. My plan is made. We will first join a woman who is dear to you—your friend—your relative."

"Francesca!"

"Yes," resumed the viscount, who was aware that this was the Christian name of the Baroness de Casanova. "You know, perhaps, that he sent her to the sea-shore, to a farm near the ruins of the château, where the millions of the brothers of the Coral Pin are hidden?"

"She is still there, then?"

"Yes, and will remain there as long as the treasure, which she has been charged to watch over, remains in the secret dungeon, chosen as its hiding-place. She does not know where you are; she believes that you have left for America, for he had the cruelty to tell her that falsehood, and she bitterly complains of having to live apart from you."

"You have seen her, then?"

"I have passed several days with her on that deserted coast. It was he who exiled me, also. He wished to make me lose all trace of you. He would exile me again if he dared. But I shall not wait for his good pleasure. Say but a word, and we will depart together. I will write to your aunt, who will prepare everything so that we may secretly embark. We will go to England with her. Men belonging to me will watch over the treasure till the chiefs decide what to do with those tons of gold which are not worth the sacrifice of my happiness."

"Silence!" said Cecilia, suddenly.

The warning was not superfluous, for Fabien had raised his voice somewhat, and the noise of a door opening announced that Saint-Hélier and his daughter were returning to their places. The viscount had taken great advantage of their absence, and he realised, as well as the young Italian, the danger of keeping up such a conversation, when it might be overheard. Neither he nor Cecilia imagined, however, that every word of their talk

had been heard by Loquetières, who had his ear against a crack in the partition. Fabien decided that it would be as well for him to speak lower, but he was very desirous of remaining, for he had several more things to say and a consent to obtain. He leaned towards Cecilia to resume the impassioned entreaty which was making so deep an impression upon her, but just then a key was turned in the door of the box. Cecilia merely had time to say to him in an agitated tone: "It is my maid! Rise! not a word before her—take leave of me at once and go!"

She had scarcely finished before the box-opener admitted Teresa, whom Cecilia had sent into the lounge to see whether she could find Orso, during the interval between the acts.

The faithful maid did not know Fabien, nor did he know her, for she had never appeared at the house of the Baroness de Casanova, and at the Tivoli Gardens she had remained at the entrance of the avenue leading to the magician's cave. However, the viscount saw that it would be imprudent to say anything more, and he unwillingly obeyed Cecilia's commands. He bowed to her in a formal manner, as though she had been receiving a ceremonious visit from him, and he felt grieved at not hearing any promise to see him again, in the words which she stammered out. Still, he took away with him a good supply of hope and happiness, for this time Cecilia had listened to him, and had not absolutely rejected his proposal of an elopement. He did not mean to stop at that point, and something said to him that his love would finally be successful.

The performance was not yet over. It threatened to become stormy, and the young Italian might need protection. On setting foot in the passage, Fabien resolved not to return to his seat in the stalls, but to keep nearer to her box. With this intent, he was making his way toward the saloon when he found himself face to face with Loquetières, who was walking about in the lobbies with the most innocent air imaginable.

Loquetières, after having met with a great disappointment, had experienced a pleasant surprise. The conversation in Italian had been entirely unintelligible to him, but the masked lady and the man, who had entered the box after the maid's departure, had conversed in very good French, and he had not lost a word of what they had said. He now greatly congratulated himself on having relinquished the pleasure of accompanying Octavie to the saloon, and on having remained in the box for the purpose of spying. Patience is always rewarded! Loquetières' perseverance had enabled him to learn in a quarter of an hour, and without stirring from his seat, more interesting things than he had been able to discover by arduous searching during three long months. However, one element of information was lacking, and that was a most indispensable one.

He could hear the male speaker in the box, but could not see him. Had he been able to do so, he would at once have known whom he had to deal with, for he had often met him, and had once even taken a special interest in his affairs. But he could not recognise him by his voice, never having had occasion to talk with him or hear him speak.

It would be wronging Loquetières' intelligence to say that he had not already drawn several inferences from the conversation which he had overheard. He was perfectly sure of one important point: the speaker was a conspirator, and so was the woman to whom he had been speaking; and as the native language of this woman appeared to be Italian, she was probably connected with the Carbonari. Thus Loquetières held a clue which might lead him to discoveries of the highest importance. He had found out, be-

sides, that the lady had a lover, a lover who neglected her and whom the speaker was trying to supplant. Love, jealousy, and rivalry : this was three times as much as was needed by a spy of his powers to unravel the best laid plot imaginable. He already saw himself famous, petted by his superiors, largely rewarded, and treated as the saviour of his country, just like the geese which saved the Capitol in olden times.

However, he needed a solid basis before making any serious accusation. People whose names are not known, cannot be denounced. So as soon as Loquetières heard the door of the next box open, he rushed out into the passage. And indeed he was in such haste to acquire visual information that he did not even pause to apologise to the chevalier and his lovely daughter, who came in just as he went out. His expeditiousness served him well, however, inasmuch as it enabled him to see Fabien de Brouage glide out of the masked woman's box, and walk hastily towards the staircase leading to the ground floor of the theatre.

Fouché's pupil now showed that he was indeed a master in his profession. An ordinary spy would at once have kept at the viscount's heels, or at all events have had his footsteps dogged by some subordinate police agents, several of whom were in the theatre, besides giving orders for this important person was not to be lost sight of. Now M. de Brouage was not a man to disappear without leaving a trace, and besides he was not likely to leave Paris as long as the Italian woman with whom he was in love remained there. Loquetières had overheard the proposal of a flight to foreign parts, which Fabien had made to the masked woman. It would suffice therefore to keep an eye upon her, and nothing could be easier, as her place of residence and mode of life were well known. Whether she ultimately went away with her admirer or not she would certainly not go that night, nor would he.

Loquetières, consequently, had time to prepare his batteries, study the ground and reconnoitre in all directions, and according to his invariable custom in such cases, he began by reflecting over the information which chance had thrown in his way, so as to reason with himself about it, and draw the right deductions. He called this "giving his thoughts a hearing." Without troubling Fabien, who gave him a contemptuous glance as he went by, but who did not dream that he had been a listener to his conversation with Stella, or that it had been overheard by any one, Loquetières quietly repaired to the saloon which was now deserted, for the audience had returned to their seats, and the curtain had again risen.

The detective took advantage of the solitude to lean over the railing of a balcony above the boulevard, and began to ponder upon the situation of affairs. "In the first place," said he to himself with rare modesty, "I have so far been acting like a perfect fool. From the very outset I have gone wrong. I made a huge mistake in the matter of the general's nephew. I took him for a mere gay fellow, because he passed his time in gambling at the baroness's rooms and elsewhere. He was conspiring, as I have now the certainty. He must even hold a high rank among the Carbonari, who are in force here, whatever the officials at the prefecture may say to the contrary. He was conspiring and is still doing so ; he is even busier than ever at the work, although that does not prevent him from being in love, and with whom ? A woman with a death's-head ? No, that is too improbable to be believed. Still, this masked woman is really hideous to behold. One of our own physicians in the police service has declared so. This testimony must be looked into. This Dr. Verdon is open to be sus-

pected ; in fact, everybody is suspicious. One thing is certain, the viscount has just made an ardent declaration to the lady. I did not hear every word that he said, for they did not speak loudly till towards the close of their conversation. I understood, however, that they were talking about a rival. Who is this rival ? Who is this masked woman ? Who is she deceiving ?—for she is deceiving some one—”

At this moment Loquetières' reflections were interrupted by the piercing voice of the illustrious Bobèche, who was showing off not far from the balcony, in front of his theatre which he called : “The Academy of Learned Monkeys.” “Do you know, gentlemen, what is the great illness of husbands ?” cried the king of showmen. “It is like a tree which sprouts from men's hearts and whose branches rise over their foreheads. It is entirely an imaginary illness ; few die of it, and a great many live by it.”

The rest was lost in the laughter of the crowd, and Loquetières resumed the earnest thinking in which he had been engaged. “She is an Italian, as she was speaking Italian with her maid. The lover or husband whom she is deceiving must be an Italian also. If it should be—but no, Hernandez is a Spaniard, that has been proved. Besides, he has been watched for the last three months, and has never set foot in the masked woman's house. I have read all the reports of our different agents. Good ! but that is no reason why the woman should not be— Yes ! yes ! of course it is her figure, her gait, her hair ! It is Signora Negroni ! I recollect that in the time of La Casanova, the viscount was making desperate love to her—there is no room for further doubt—they have found each other again !—but how can she have become so ugly ?—if indeed she really be so ? I neither know nor care. However, I have them all in my power. I hold the conspiracy, the principal woman concerned in it, and all the Carbonari ! My fortune is made !”

“Gentlemen,” yelled Bobèche at this moment, “people say that business is at a standstill. That is false. There is a great deal of buying and selling ; I myself, now, bought three shirts, and I have already sold two of them.”

This sarcastic sally was not novel, for Galimafré's partner had already made use of it under the Empire, at the time of the continental blockade, but people still laughed at it. It fell like a shower of cold water upon Loquetières' enthusiasm.

“That clown is right,” he muttered. “France is far from rich just now, and the government cannot throw money away, and, besides, they no longer know how to pay for a service to the state. Fouché was the man. He used to go as far as hundreds of thousands when it was worth his while. Three hundred thousand francs were given to the man who gave up Pichegru. It is worth a million to give up the Carbonari, but I should perhaps get a paltry ten thousand crowns, and what would that amount to ? It is not with fifteen hundred francs more income that I should induce Octavie to accept of me as her husband. And to think I must run the risk of my life to attain even that paltry result. The Carbonari are not tender in their way of dealing with their enemies, and they already suspect me. Colonel Fournès is probably one of them, and he knows me only too well. There is nothing but trouble to be gained by meddling with these people, and I had better let them alone. Still, I shall never have such luck again. The prefect, the ministers, the government are all sound asleep, and don't imagine that the Parisians think of anything but singing : ‘ Long live Henri Quatre !’ What a blow to them if I wake them up by proving

to them that a conspiracy is afoot compared to which all the rest were mere milk and water; that the conspirators have 'a war' treasure, an important one forsooth; for the viscount spoke of millions hidden in a tower, tons of gold in a subterranean dungeon!"

At this point in his reflections Loquetières suddenly paused. His eyes brightened, his face lighted up, and he began to smile. "What an idea!" said he to himself. "What if I collared those tons of gold? What if I carried off those millions? What if I kept them for myself alone?—I haven't the least wish to share them with the state—they exist, there can be no doubt of that—the viscount said so, and Stella Negroni did not deny it—and they spoke in good faith, as they did not know that I was listening. The only thing to do now is to find out the hiding place. It isn't so hard to do—those lovers without knowing it let in a lot of light upon the matter—a ruined château—a deserted coast. Why the place must be situated not far from the estate of that charming viscount, and a valuable piece of information which I had forgotten is that the treasure is being guarded by the aunt of the masked woman. Her aunt is of course that dear baroness, and I should recognize her if I met her in Pekin dressed as a Chinese woman. Ah! this time I see my way to wealth! Fabien, his lady-love, and the Carbonari may turn Paris topsy turvy if they like. I sha'n't trouble them, for I am going to travel. I feel that I need sea-bathing, and I shall tell Saint-Hélier that I am going to drink the waters at Plombières. Ah! ah! if I confided my plans to him he would want his share. I must go back to him in the box, however, the dear chevalier must be greatly astonished at my absence."

Loquetières never imagined that at the very moment when he was making all these fine plans, Saint-Hélier, instead of listening to the play, was also thinking of the "Golden Fleece" and arranging a journey to the same spot where his friend meant to betake himself.

Loquetières was radiant, exultant. He almost shouted "Eureka!" like Archimedes.

The noisy music outside Bobèche's show was playing an air from *Beautiful Arsenia* by Monsigny: "Triumph, handsome Alcindor!" And it seemed as though the monkey's orchestra were celebrating the victory of the elderly suitor for Octavie's hand.

A loud noise from the auditorium of the Panorama Dramatique replied to the joyful melody rising from the boulevard to the balcony. The second act of *Ogier the Dane* had just ended, and the applause of the royalists struggled with the hissing of the liberals. Matters were growing hot in the theatre, but the great battle had not yet been fought, and the audience were leaving in great numbers. Loquetières, quite astonished at having given so long a time to thought, made haste to return to his box, where he had been rude enough to leave Octavie alone with her worthy papa. In the passage, however, he ran up against Bernaville, who exclaimed at sight of him:

"Hallo, my dear friend, it's lucky I met you, for I began to think that you were hiding yourself. What! when a man has the inestimable pleasure of passing the evening with Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, how can he possibly let her find her way alone to the saloon for refreshments, and leave her box just as she goes into it? Loquetières, my friend, this isn't like you. I thought that you were the only surviving relic of French gallantry. Now, to punish you, I will tell you that I turned your absence to account. In the first place, I offered ices to the divine Octavie, and she did not refuse them."

"I am delighted to hear it," stammered the spy, who wished to get rid of Bernaville.

"Besides, we made a little fun of you, let me tell you ! Octavie declared that you have serious intentions as regards the masked millionaire, and that you stayed in the box in order to make love to her."

"Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier was joking, I presume."

"Oh no ! we agreed that you had a chance of success. But I advised her to plague you with a rival, her father's secretary, that young Gascon, you know."

"My dear sir, you joke very amusingly, but you must allow me to go and join—"

"The chevalier and his charming daughter, eh ! Well, I won't detain you. On the contrary, I will go with you to their box. Does it surprise you ? You would be much more surprised if I told you that I have a letter to hand to Mademoiselle Octavie."

"A letter for Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier ?"

"Yes," replied Bernaville, quietly.

"From yourself ?"

"Nonsense ! If I wrote to the divine Octavie I should not tell you about it, as you are as jealous as a tiger."

"I am not jealous of you, I assure you."

"You may be wrong in that. However, that is not the question. The letter comes from another person."

"Who is it ?"

"I don't know, my dear friend."

"But who gave it to you."

"A person whom I do not at all know."

"It's incredible !"

"It is true. And now that I have tormented you enough, I will tell you the whole story. It is an odd one. Just fancy that just now, when the interval between the acts was over, and I had said good-bye to the chevalier, I was accosted by a man of tolerably good appearance, who said to me, without the least ceremony : 'Sir, I know who you are, and that I can trust you. I therefore beg of you to give this letter to Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier whom you have just left.' To be taken for a letter-carrier by this individual seemed to me rather too much, and I asked him what he meant by it. Do you know what he said ?"

"I cannot guess."

"He answered me as coolly as possible : 'You don't understand the matter. This is not a love-letter. It is news of the greatest importance to the young lady, and I have serious reasons for not handing her the letter myself. I just now received a note from a friend, enclosing this one, which he told me what to do with. I at once went to the Place Royale, and was informed that Monsieur de Saint-Hélier and his daughter were here. You are free to refuse doing what I ask ; but I warn you that your refusal will perhaps cause a great misfortune. If you accept, I trust entirely to you. The only thing I ask of you is to give the letter to the lady yourself, and to prove to you that it isn't a love letter, I must tell you there is no objection to your handing it to her in her father's presence.'"

"Stranger and stranger ! And you are going to do what he asked !"

"Certainly, why not ?"

"It is rather a delicate thing."

"Delicate ; what do you mean ? The chevalier is with his daughter. I

sha'n't make any mystery about placing the mysterious missive in the fair hands of the adorable person to whom it is addressed. Everything will be done as properly as possible."

"That is all very well, but in your place I—"

"What would *you* do, pray?"

"I shouldn't deliver it."

"It is too late. The man has gone away, so I cannot return the letter to him, or even tear it up; it would be an abuse of confidence."

"Take care! Suppose Saint-Héliér should be angry."

"That, my dear sir, is a matter of perfect indifference to me. But you are mistaken. He won't be angry. He is of a very easy disposition, and allows Mademoiselle Octavie a great deal of freedom. I'll venture to say that you would willingly consent to take the place of postman for me."

"I should not refuse, but it would only be to oblige you."

"Thanks! I shall not trespass on your good nature," replied Bernaville, laughing. "The discretion of lovers must not be over-trie'd, and you are very much in love, my dear Loquetières."

"Oh! at my age—"

"Age makes no difference. And the proof of it is that you would give a great deal to know what is written in this letter from the fair Octavie's anonymous lover."

As the journalist spoke, he turned and twisted the letter in his hands. It did not look like a love-letter, in point of fact. It was of respectable dimensions, ill-fitted to be slipped into a lady's hand, or between the folds of a fan. Loquetières remarked, however, that it bore no stamp; but this was explained by the fact that it had been addressed to a "go between." After all, he was in reality less interested in the singular occurrence than Bernaville supposed; in the first place, because he was of a philosophical turn of mind, and more especially because he was thinking of the great discovery which he had made. The tons of gold were always before his eyes.

The editor of the *White Flag* now thought that he had quizzed him enough, and gaily concluded, "Resign yourself, my dear friend, to not knowing Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér's secrets. She won't have any from you when she is Madame des Loquetières. While you are waiting for the happy day when you will lead her to the altar, lead me to her box. I want you to be present when the message is given. You will see how I understand being an ambassador."

This proposition somewhat embarrassed the spy, who was divided between a desire to see how Octavie would look on receiving the letter, and a longing to ponder alone upon his plans anent the treasure. Finally, however, he decided to take Bernaville to the box. The crowd, profiting by this, the second intermission, was now spreading about the lounge and passages. The viscount would no doubt soon return to hang about Stella Negroni's box, and Loquetières preferred not to meet him.

By chance, the box-opener was at her post, and admitted the two visitors. Loquetières' astonishment may easily be imagined when he saw Octavie leaning upon the front of the box and talking to the masked woman. Bernaville was less surprised. He remembered that in the saloon he had jestingly advised Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér to set Marcas after the masked heiress, and he thought that, taking an interest in the young secretary, she was making overtures in his behalf.

"It is I, once more, my dear chevalier," said he to the father, who was

looking about the theatre with his glasses, probably in order not to annoy his daughter.

"You are welcome," replied Saint-Hélier, at once. "I see that you have brought our friend, Loquetières, back. It is really fortunate, for he seems trying to keep out of our way."

"Pray, excuse me; it is so warm here that I was obliged to go to the saloon to get a breath of air," hastily replied the diplomatist of Fouché's school.

"I must defend our friend," said Bernaville. "If he did not return before, the fault is mine. I met him in the passage, and we had a talk together. I hope that Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier will forgive me for having detained him."

"Oh! with all my heart," replied Octave, disdainfully.

She had ceased talking to the Italian lady (who had drawn back as soon as she heard the voices of the new comers), but she seemed scarcely disposed to talk with her father's friends. Bernaville, however, was a man who liked to torment people. "Just imagine," he resumed, "this poor Loquetières is suffering martyrdom, and all on your account, mademoiselle."

"I don't understand," replied the golden-haired beauty, somewhat haughtily.

"It is very simple, however. My friend has a heart, and a sensitive one—a heart which your charms have touched. Now, I have just told him that an unknown person has given me a letter to hand to you."

"Pray, sir," interrupted Octavie, "jokes of this kind are in very bad taste, and I beg of you to stop them."

"I swear to you, mademoiselle, that I am not joking. Here is the letter."

The annoyance which the editor's light talk had caused Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier changed into stupor when Bernaville handed her the letter. She took it, however, unhesitatingly, looked at the address, and said at once: "Very well, I know what it is."

Her voice was calm, and her face did not change colour. But Bernaville, who was stealthily observing her, saw a sparkle come to her eyes and die away at once.

The chevalier seemed much more disturbed than his daughter, either because his dignity as a father was offended, or because he mistrusted Octavie's correspondents since a certain night spent in the Dark Room. However, he said nothing, for she had accustomed him to her independent ways, and even in his friends' presence he did not shrink from leaving her absolutely free to do as she pleased. She felt, however, that some sort of explanation was necessary, so she added: "This letter comes from a poor clerk who has lost his situation, and is in the greatest distress. He has a wife and children, and I have already helped him, as I shall do again."

"I was sure that it was something of that sort!" exclaimed the editor. "You are as good as you are beautiful, mademoiselle. I was saying to Loquetières, that this unknown correspondent must be some unfortunate person who wished to appeal to your charity. He must be ill, as he did not come himself. He gave his message to a very well-dressed man, upon my word! and the case must be urgent, for his zealous, but timid friend, who did not dare approach you, told me that if the letter were not delivered soon, a great misfortune might happen."

This time Octavie turned somewhat pale, and it was with less assur-

ance that she replied: "Those who are in trouble are always in a hurry. I will attend to this unfortunate man to-morrow."

"Why not to-night?" asked the editor, maliciously. "I know, mademoiselle, that you cannot leave the theatre to go to the poor devil's assistance. But if you are willing, I will go in your place, and I feel sure that Loquetières will go with me to take the poor man some money, if you will tell us his name and address."

Octavie could not hide a gesture of impatience, and made no haste to reply.

"Now I think of it," said Bernaville, raising his voice, so that the masked lady was forced to hear what he was saying, "why not make up a subscription among ourselves to help your petitioner? A clerk out of a situation, and with a wife and children, five or six of them perhaps, what could be more touching? I am not rich, but I will give two louis, and I am sure Loquetières will give three. As for the dear chevalier, I leave the matter to his generosity. I can rely upon him."

"You are really too kind," answered Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér, pale with anger.

"I am sure that if you appealed to the heart of the lady who was talking with you when I came in, she would not refuse to join in your good work."

This was said so loudly, that Cecilia felt herself obliged to reply. She had exchanged a few polite words with Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér, who had shown a great deal of eagerness to enter into conversation with her; and she had been greatly struck by the marvellous beauty of the chevalier's daughter. Cecilia, being an Italian, had innate artistic tendencies, and the superb Octavie had made the same impression upon her as a picture by Titian would have done. She felt drawn towards the chevalier's daughter, and willingly seized the opportunity of renewing the conversation. "I should be very happy," said she, "to take part in a work of charity."

"Ah! mademoiselle," said Bernaville, delighted by the success of his trick, "you cannot now refuse to read the unfortunate man's letter, and tell us what he asks for."

Octavie was choking with rage, but she succeeded in commanding herself and coming to a resolution. "You are right, sir," she said calmly; "the poor must not be made to wait." And she opened the letter.

While she was reading it, the faces of the three men in the box were an interesting study. Saint-Héliér, who was somewhat anxious, tried to maintain an appearance of majestic indifference. Loquetières, puzzled to such an extent, that he momentarily even forgot the treasure in the dungeon, attentively studied the reader's face. Meanwhile, Bernaville was laughing in his sleeve, and pretending to be greatly moved, though in reality he was delighted, for there was something of a monkey in the nature of this ardent polemist; he delighted in playing people malicious tricks.

Octavie, however, took it upon herself to disconcert him. "Thank you, madame, in this poor man's name," said she to her neighbour; "and you, too, sir, for your offers of service; but I must decline them, for my correspondent says that he has just inherited a little money, and can have his place again if some influential person will recommend him to the minister who discharged him. He begs me to write at once to this person, who is the father of one of my schoolmates. I shall do so to-morrow." So saying, Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér put the letter into her bosom.

The chevalier looked up with a satisfied air, although he did not believe a word that his daughter had said; Loquetières hung his head beneath this

shower of falsehood, and Bernaville contented himself with smiling. He was thinking to himself : "She is very cunning indeed."

Octavie was indeed more cunning than he thought ; the letter, which was written by Marcas, ran as follows : "You told me to conquer. I have conquered. I have forced the man to fight with me. He won't trouble you again, for if he is not dead he must be dying. I left him with a sword-thrust in the breast, and lying prostrate upon the grass in the garden of a lonely house in an obscure hamlet. The duel had but one witness who will not expose me. I myself am wounded, and suffer terribly, but do not complain. All the blood in my veins is yours. I have found a secure retreat, thanks to a worthy doctor, who has promised to cure me. He says that it will take a long time. He is mistaken, for I am firmly resolved to return to Paris as soon as I am able to stand. Before fighting, the man wrote a letter, which was posted, as I know. It was addressed to his cousin. You will no longer think that he was in love with you, after this? At Tivoli, when I said to you that I should like to exterminate this race of aristocrats, you replied, 'The youngest of the family is a woman, and your sword could not harm her. Women only die of love.' Well, Antoinette de B— now knows that René de B— cannot recover. Do you think that she will survive him?

"I write to you through a friend, the only one in whom I can confide. He will do whatever is needed, so that this letter may reach you as soon as it arrives in Paris. I do not ask you to reply. One must foresee the contingency of my letter falling into other hands than your own. Anything may happen. It will therefore be better for you to remain ignorant of my present whereabouts.

"You will soon see me, but I shall not appear at your father's house. He would naturally ask why my arm is in a sling. Leave your window open every night, between ten and eleven, the one which opens upon the Place Royale. Some night a key will be thrown in, wrapped in paper. When you have read the words written upon that paper, you will know what to do with the key ; and if Zimena thinks that I have deserved the prize, she will be mine, as I am hers."

This note, hardly a loving one, was signed with an initial only, a V. But Octavie did not need to see a signature to recognise the writing and the style of Marcas. The Gascon was apparent in every line. A Gascon alone could find such ambiguous and yet such meaning phrases, affect such simplicity in the narrative of his homicidal exploit, and imitate with such shamelessness the heroic laconism of the great Corneille. And Octavie must have had as much nerve as the Southerner to hide from the three men, whose eyes were upon her, the emotion which this letter caused her. It is true, however, that joy is easier to hide than sorrow.

The message which she had been so anxiously expecting for the last two days was full of good news. René was either dead or mortally wounded ; the conqueror kept away from Paris by a wound ; the certainty of being free from the importunities of both of these lovers, who were in her way, this was enough to make Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier rejoice, and the success of her plans was beyond her hopes.

However, the passage relating to the general's daughter was better than all the rest, for it fulfilled all the desires of the ambitious Octavie. Antoinette de Brouage was in her way, and she began to believe that by killing René, Marcas had killed Antoinette de Brouage as well. And, in order that nothing might be wanting to her satis-

faction, Bernaville had just told her that Mademoiselle de Brouage had disappeared.

Where had she gone? Octavie guessed where, and said to herself with arrogant satisfaction: "Dead or dishonoured, it is all the same. The marquis has no daughter now. And it sufficed for me to order this for it to happen."

"I congratulate you sincerely, mademoiselle," now said Bernaville. "Not content with helping those who lose their situations, you give them their situations back. If I ever lose my place as editor of the *White Flag*, I shall apply to you at once. But what is the matter, my dear friend?" said the pitiless tormentor to Loquetières, who was looking mournful enough. "You are quite troubled. Have you a grudge against me for having delivered this poor devil's letter?"

The booming of the big drum in the orchestra sounded just in time to save Fouché's pupil from the necessity of replying.

"Oho!" said the editor, "the third and the last act is about to begin. It is now that the great contest will take place. I must be at my post, and all the more as there seem to be more liberals here than royalists. If they come to blows I must have my share. So allow me, chevalier, to leave you, and you, mademoiselle, allow me to congratulate you again before taking leave of you and of these gentlemen. You are charity personified; you console all who are afflicted," added Bernaville, with a glance at the neighbouring box. And bending over Octavie he said, in a low tone, so that she alone could hear it: "To make your benefactions complete, you ought to bestow a husband on that unfortunate millionaire. What a fine match for a young private secretary! Think of what I said to you in the lounge."

The advice was superfluous. Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier was already thinking of the advice given hap-hazard by the joking newspaper-writer, for she saw that Marcas would now prove a serious impediment to her plans, and that she must at any cost get rid of him. "Will he take her?" she thought to herself. "Yes, if she really has millions of money, for he is ambitious. But will she take him? Why not? I see that she is pleased with me. I shall have no trouble in becoming acquainted with her, and I will try to induce her to receive Marcas. If I pay that price for the thrust which he has given the Count de Brouage, he won't be able to complain of Zimena."

Bernaville had let the last arrows of his malice fly, and he went off, leaving those at whom he had aimed them to their own reflections. The two men were not in a very good humour, but Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier herself experienced agreeable sensations similar to those that a chess-player feels after taking his adversary's queen. Leaving the chevalier and Loquetières to sulk at their ease, she leaned her elbow upon the front of the box, near the partition, in order to be able to renew her conversation with the masked woman. Cecilia did not avoid conversation, and since the last intermission she had lowered the grating which had hidden her from the audience. She no longer expected to see Orso, and was trying to divert her thoughts from Fabien's ardent words by talking to the beautiful stranger whom chance had placed near her.

She little thought that the viscount, from the corner of the stalls where he had now seated himself, was devouring her with his eyes, and that he suffered horribly on seeing that she was conversing with Octavie. He asked himself what charm the golden-haired witch could have exercised over her neighbour to make her reply to what she said, and what purpose

she could have in opening a conversation with Stella Negroni. At the same time he resolved to warn the imprudent Italian of the danger to which she exposed herself by forming an acquaintance with the daughter of a spy. For the moment, however, it was impossible to stir, for all the spectators had resumed their seats, and he found himself blockaded in the stalls.

The curtain rose and a murmur of satisfaction greeted the scenery, for in those days the spectators were not spoiled by way of scenic effects. The preceding act had taken place in the palace of the King of Denmark, a palace which was badly furnished, and worse tenanted, for the courtiers of Seward, the usurper, had looked as though they came from the public ball at La Courtille. But the present scene was a mountain gorge, on the shores of the Baltic, and the scene-painters had evidently aimed at gathering the most singular and incongruous sites within the space of a few feet. There was the sea, purple with the glow of a volcano seen in the distance, a glacier overhanging a precipice, a pine forest, a ravine with the inevitable bridge over the torrent, some druidical stones, and, in the very midst of this complicated landscape, a singular-looking pile, something between a pyramid and a bastion, for it was pointed at the top and wide at the base. The character of this graceful structure was intimated by an inscription in red letters upon its portals. It was the famous Temple of Death, which had more than once been alluded to in the play.

At that time, which was the Golden Age of melodrama, authors did not pride themselves upon varying situations, and they willingly sacrificed realism to stage-effects. The ingredients of dramatic cookery were always the same: a barbaric tyrant, the chief of a robber-band, a persecuted and innocent young girl, a man deeply in love, a simpleton, and a traitor. The same materials are now in use, dressed with another sauce, not much more delicate. As for style, it has not much changed, and the affected speeches of Ogier the Dane would still have a certain success at some of the Boulevard theatres.

The good Ogier, disguised as a hermit, was now prowling about, within a short distance of the Temple of Death; he was watching for Seward, and, while waiting for the rascal to appear, he indulged in a violent attack upon the fomenters of revolutions, who hid their frightful projects under feigned mildness, and he predicted approaching and exemplary punishment.

"That's what you have to look out for, Messrs. Liberals," said a royalist in the stalls, loud enough to be heard by the pit.

This interruption, which was most improper, to say the least, made the storm burst forth. Hisses were heard from all parts of the house. People applauding tried to drown the sharp sound of the piped keys, used as whistles, but were unsuccessful, and the perfidious Seward came in at the height of the tempest. He came with the laudable intention of appropriating the treasures which he declared had been concealed by the clergy of the country inside an idol, placed at the further end of the temple, and he at once accosted the false hermit to ask for some information, which the hermit proceeded to give him.

"Don't you think this play very stupid?" said Octavie to her masked neighbour.

"I am a foreigner, and it is hard for me to judge," replied Cecilia; "but it does not interest me, and I don't intend to remain till it is over."

"I shall not wait for the end, either," replied Mademoiselle de Saint-

Héliér, who had formed the project of leaving the house at the same time as the masked lady.

Loquetières and the chevalier did not overhear these words. They had been listening with but little attention, since treasures had been alluded to in the play, for the millions of the Temple of Death made them think of the tons of gold in the subterranean dungeon. Each of them was at that moment devising a plan which he would not, on any account, have allowed the other to divine. The chevalier's scheme was more matured than that of Loquetières, for he had been thinking it over for a greater length of time.

Ogier the Dane also had a plan, and he knew very well what he was about when he revealed to Seward that all he had to do was to press upon a knob in the beard of the "devouring statue," whereupon this statue—which was in reality a safe—would open and place all the gold it held at the disposal of the bold knight who dared to climb upon its knees. Seward thanked him, and marched straight towards the temple, exclaiming: "Ah! wealth wrested by the rapacity of the druids from the credulous people, you will now be mine!"

"Wretch!" muttered the valiant Ogier, "it is not the wealth accumulated by the pious ministers of religion that is about to belong to you, but you are about to belong to death."

This "aside" made a great impression upon Boulardot, who said, in a rather loud tone to his wife: "The play is well written, but it gives a bad example. People ought not to urge a man into a trap in which he will perish, especially when this indelicate act has no other aim than to keep the money of the clergy locked up."

This remark found an echo in the gallery; for one of the corporal's neighbours shook his fist in the face of Ogier the Dane, and called out to him: "You're a Jesuit!"

"Down with the Jesuits!" repeated the people in the pit, in chorus.

"Don't go there, Melchior!" called out the boys in the top gallery, addressing the actor playing "Seward" by his real name, as he was on his way to the temple, "don't go, old man, the statue will eat you!"

Then an indescribable tumult arose, which did not allow the quiet spectators to admire the effect produced by the opening of the doors of the "Temple of Death," at the farther end of which the "devouring statue" stood. This statue deserved its name, for when the traitor ventured into its arms, it eat him up so completely that not a vestige of him remained. "Just punishment for revolt and impiety!" remarked Ogier the Dane, raising his arms to heaven. "Thus perish all the enemies of the throne and the altar!"

"Bravo! it is the ninth Thermidor!" called out an officer of the guard.

"Long live Robespierre!" replied a citizen, who at once received a violent box on the ear.

A hundred arms were raised at once; the spectators in the stalls and those in the pit all threw themselves upon one another, and Cecilia, who beheld the battle from above, turned pale on seeing the Viscount de Brouage surrounded by people who were threatening him.

Formerly, when Fabien had pursued her with his attentions in the baroness's room, she had been indifferent to him, although she already knew that his love for her was sincere. But she had been then entirely absorbed in Orso; other men did not exist for her, and she cared so little for her young lover that she had not even been moved on hearing that he was

about to be subjected to a test in which his life would be imperilled. But three months had since elapsed, three months of isolation and indescribable suffering. Cecilia had begun to despair of ever seeing Orso again, and to curse the fatal night on which she had believed in his vows of eternal fidelity.

In her excited mind despair promptly followed upon enthusiasm, and not being able to resign herself to live without love, she had been thinking of death, when chance suddenly placed her face to face with Fabien in the cave at the Tivoli Gardens. The interview had been a short one, and Cecilia had so carefully restrained all expression of feeling that Fabien had left her, not discouraged, but grieved. However, Cecilia was already deceiving herself and Fabien, when she maintained that Orso still loved her, and when she swore never to belong to any one but him. She had more than once been on the point of revealing her true feelings while the enamoured viscount told her that the chief of the Carbonari neglected her for the sake of conspiring, and scorned her, now that she had voluntarily disfigured her face. And after that impassioned scene, when she had found herself alone in the luxurious abode which was her prison, given up without defence to all the temptation of despair, she could not but compare the ardour of the Viscount de Brouage with the indifference of the Prince of Catanzaro.

This young Frenchman whom she had formerly accused of frivolity had not changed; absence had but increased his love, and on learning that Cecilia's beauty no longer existed, he had exclaimed: "It is you whom I adore, not your face. If you doubt my sincerity, put it to the proof." Nothing in the world would have tempted her to do that, however, and she said to herself that the only course for her to pursue was to fly to America, where at least Francesca Rance would join her. She had often thought of disobeying Orso, and calling at his residence, at the risk of seriously compromising him. But the fear of being repelled by an ungrateful heart had deterred her from that idea. She preferred exile to exposing herself to such a mortal affront.

The experiment she had made in coming to the Panorama-Dramatique was to be the last. She had made up her mind to leave France in a few days' time if she did not meet her unfaithful husband at the theatre. But she had met Fabien, and he was more in love, more eager and more devoted than ever, ready to give his life for her sake, and he had entreated her to go with him to a foreign country, and had offered to take Francesca, whom she longed so much to see again.

Cecilia had come to the point of asking herself why she still struggled against the fate which urged her towards M. de Brouage, when the tumult burst forth. The curtain fell, and the audience having nothing more to look at on the stage, now only thought of throwing themselves upon one another and fighting. This climax had been anticipated, although it had not been announced in the posters: and each person present made up his mind to pummel one or more of his political enemies. The recollection of the first performance of Arnault's tragedy *Germanicus* was still sufficiently fresh for the royalists beaten at the Théâtre Français to wish to take their revenge at the Panorama-Dramatique. The box on the ear given by an officer to an admirer of Seward the regicide had been the signal for battle.

In the twinkling of an eye, innumerable blows were exchanged, and several of the combatants were under the benches already; thanks, however, to the wise prohibition which forbade bringing canes into the theatre,

fisticuffs alone were resorted to, and it might be hoped that there would not be much bloodshed. Unfortunately, some old Imperialist officers had taken it into their heads to conceal under their long coats some knotty cudgels which they had called Germanicus clubs, since the memorable evening when so much fighting had taken place. They darted from the lower end of the pit and fell upon the royalists in the stalls, on seeing which, such royalist officers as were present in uniform drew their swords at once.

The Viscount de Brouage was going out to try and join the loved woman whom he still called Stella Negroni, when he was borne into the middle of the auditorium, despite of himself, by a host of assailants. He was thus obliged to take part in the fray, although he had no desire to do so, and his evil star brought him into the midst of a group of officers who had just drawn their swords to defend themselves. Almost immediately a thrust, which was probably not meant for him, grazed his chest and made a hole in his coat. This sufficed for him to forget all his wise determinations. Seizing hold of the sword of a guardsman who had not had time to draw it, he sprang upon a bench and began fencing with everybody who approached him. He soon had two or three antagonists, and wounded one, who fell. A struggle beyond description followed, and the rash viscount was in the centre of the fray.

Cecilia saw him, sword in hand, his hair in disorder, his garments rent, assailed, surrounded, and pressed on every side; she heard the cries, shouts and threats addressed to him, and she threw herself back in the box, saying to Teresa: "The Holy Virgin protect him! They are going to kill him!"

Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier had a quick ear, and knew enough Italian to understand the meaning of this short sentence in Tasso's language. She also had seen M. de Brouage fighting fiercely, and had immediately recognized him, for during the intermission after the first act he had appeared for a moment in the saloon, and Bernaville had mentioned his name to the chevalier and his daughter. "It is for René's brother that she shows so much interest," thought Octavie. "Can she love him? That would be a strange coincidence, and might serve me."

Loquetières now knew what to think of the ties that bound the viscount to the masked woman, and meant to turn his knowledge to account; but for the moment he thought that his place was beside the commissary of police on duty in the theatre. Loquetières had a report to make, and this was not the time to fail in his professional duty, for he was about to ask for a leave of absence, and under existing political circumstances a leave was a difficult thing for an able spy to obtain.

"This squabble appears to me to be assuming alarming proportions," said he. "I will go and find out what it all is, for I am afraid that we shall have some trouble in getting out of the theatre."

"Yes," said Octavie, in a mocking tone, "go and see what is going on, and don't trouble yourself about me, for I shall be sufficiently protected by my father."

Loquetières did not require to be told twice. In former days he would have felt ashamed to desert Saint-Hélier and his charming daughter in this fashion, but now he was absorbed by one idea alone. He saw neither Octavie, nor the chevalier, neither the woman with the mask, nor Fabien de Brouage; he saw nothing but the heaps of gold in the vaults.

He slipped away, promising to return, although he had fully decided to devote the rest of the evening to his report, and, scarcely had he left the

box than Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier said to her father : " We cannot let that young woman go away alone. I will ask her to come with us through the crowd, and we will take her home in our carriage."

" The mischief of it is that I shall have my hands full with you," said the chevalier. " I am sure that there will be a perfect crush on the stairs."

" No matter. It must be done," replied Octavie in a firm tone. And opening the door of the box she went out to visit her interesting neighbour.

She did not find herself under the necessity of knocking at the masked woman's door. Teresa was frightened, and had already opened it and was urging her mistress to come away. However, Cecilia remained motionless, and gazed with terror on the battle going on beneath her. The combatants had become almost invisible, for their stamping about had raised thick clouds of dust, and almost all the footlights were already out, the glasses having been broken by the various projectiles which the urchins in the galleries had flung at them. The peaceful part of the audience had left their seats with all speed, and were hastening towards the exits. They, in fact, filled the passages, so that it was extremely difficult to move on.

" Come, madame," said Octavie, placing her delicately gloved hand upon Cecilia's beautiful arm. " Alone with your maid you will not be able to get through the crowd. My father will make way for us, but we have not a moment to lose."

Cecilia was so greatly disturbed that she allowed herself to be led away without a word. Fabien had disappeared in the struggle, and she believed that he had fallen under the blows of his antagonists. " Ah ! " she thought, " he alone loved me ; and if he is dead I can but die ! "

And then she followed Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, who had remained perfectly calm, and who at once told her father to go on before them and make way for them to pass. The chevalier was not cut out for such a task, but he still had some vigour left him, and felt the necessity for prompt action. He therefore took the place assigned him by Octavie, and did his best to open a passage for himself and the three women with him. The corridor on the first floor was not so greatly crowded, and all went well as far as the staircase, where they met spectators coming from the second floor, so that the crush grew greater. All these people in a hurry elbowed one another fiercely, and had lost their senses so entirely that they paid no attention to the masked woman.

However, Saint-Hélier and his party arrived without any accident at the bottom of the winding staircase which they had descended with so much difficulty, and they thought for a moment that all danger was over. Unfortunately, the architects who had built the Panorama had neglected to make the exits wide enough. The double door opening upon the boulevard was much too narrow to admit of the passage of the crowd now pressing forward in its eagerness to get away. Frightful confusion arose, and the danger became serious. The chevalier, excited by the peril, made the most energetic efforts to advance, but could not. Cecilia, Octavie, and Teresa did not waver, but other women in the crowd shrieked, and clutched hold of whoever was near them. And among the men there were also some cowards who pushed violently on at the risk of crushing the weak.

Soon matters became worse. A detachment of soldiers came up to restore order in the auditorium, and the officer who commanded them had the unlucky idea of entering the building by the door obstructed by the crowd. As an additional misfortune, the combatants of the stalls and the

pit at the same moment poured along the passage on the ground floor, for the battle was now over without there being any vanquishers or vanquished. Neither party could be said to have had the upper hand. Canes and swords had been broken, and tired of sticking and fencing, both royalists and liberals had given up the struggle, leaving some wounded men behind them, and bent on leaving the theatre, for fear of being arrested by the guard.

Between these two adverse currents—the soldiers, who were trying to get in, and the rioters, who were trying to go out—the chevalier, his daughter, and the two Italian women, together with many other quiet and inoffensive citizens, were caught as in a trap. The chevalier thought that there was no chance of escape, and even Octavie began to feel terrified. Cecilia turned her thoughts to Heaven and resigned herself to death. Then there suddenly came a kind of snapping of the group in which they all stood. It was rent asunder, and its two sections were impelled in different directions. Saint-Hélier, his daughter, and Teresa, driven on by an irresistible force, found themselves upon the boulevard without knowing how they had been carried there.

Cecilia, violently torn from them, was thrown towards the winding corridor beside the pit. It was quite dark there; there was no air, and the human torrent confined between the two narrow walls rolled on impetuously. The young woman gave one cry, only one, and lost consciousness. If the human mass around her had been less compact, she would have fallen and of a certainty been trampled and crushed beneath the feet of the crowd. But she was so closely pressed against on all sides, that she remained standing although she had neither strength nor feeling left her. Chance might have carried her on in this way out of the theatre, but the current which was rushing into the building drove back the current bent on rushing out, and in the twinkling of an eye the swooning woman was carried on to the end of the passage, where there was a closed door.

This door communicated with the slips, and was only opened to privileged persons allowed to go behind the scenes; however, it could not resist the violent pressure now brought against it, and speedily began to give way. A few vigorous kicks broke it down, and a dozen men sprang over its fragments and dashed up the narrow staircase beyond. Cecilia fell down upon the first step, and would have been killed on the spot, if, by a miracle, a deliverer had not found himself near at hand to rescue her. This deliverer sent by Providence, which protects the weak, was Fabien de Brouage, who had had a marvellous escape from the swords drawn against him, and who was covered with dust, and had his clothes torn, besides being wounded in the face and arm. After wounding two of his foes he had been dragged away by unknown friends, men of the Coral Pin Association, no doubt, who had wished to save him from the wrath of the royalists, he being so valiant a champion of their cause. He had not forgotten Stella Negroni, and longed to find her. And indeed it was mainly in view of doing so that he allowed himself to be borne away from the field of battle. In the passage, however, his defenders came in contact with the backward torrent caused by the entrance of the soldiery. They were obliged to recoil, and chance threw Stella against Fabien, who was nearly dragged down by her as she fell, when the door of the slips suddenly gave way. On seeing her stretched out upon the ladder-like stairs, which one had to climb to reach the stage, he recognised her by her mask of black velvet, and in an instant raised her in his arms. His success in executing this delicate manœuvre

was marvellous, had he slipped he would have been crushed as well as Stella herself.

As soon as he had gone up the stairs he was out of danger, for the stage was large and abundantly provided with exits. The fugitives, anxious to escape the soldiers and the police, soon invaded it, and some concealed themselves in the "Druids' Forest," and others in the "Gorge on the Shores of the Baltic." Others were taken down under the stage by the actor who had played Seward the Regicide, and who was altogether suited to the part, as he had very "liberal" opinions.

Fabien needed no help to reach the exit. Guided by instinct and with his youthful vigour to serve him, he crossed the labyrinth behind the scenes, found the actors' exit, and thus, without accident or once relinquishing his precious burden, he reached the dark street which ran behind all the theatres on the Boulevard du Crime. The actors, supernumeraries, and employees of the Panorama-Dramatique were all in a state of great excitement, and no one asked for any explanation, or inquired why he was carrying away a masked woman, although he had quite the appearance of the villain of a melodrama abducting some "innocent victim."

When on the "King's highway," as the phrase went in those days, M. de Brouage would have been greatly embarrassed if a cab, which was waiting for the lady who had played the part of the heroine in the play, had not been near at hand. Fabien ran towards it, opened the door, laid Stella on the cushions of this public conveyance, silenced the objections of the cabman by giving him a twenty-franc piece, and ordered him to drive to the Rue de Vaugirard.

Perhaps he would have been less daring and less prompt in giving his own address if Cecilia had been in a condition to hear him. But she had not revived, and, to a man so much in love, now was the time or never to bring matters to an issue by carrying the lady off.

Since he had conversed with Stella in her box, the viscount had resolved to end either his uncertainty or his life—to leave France with Stella Negroni, or kill himself before her very eyes. What did he now care for the Carbonari or the treasures of the Association of the Coral Pin? What did he now care for the grandmaster whom he had formerly thought himself bound to obey? He was ready, for a kiss from Stella, to renounce all the chimerical dreams which he had pursued with such ardour before he had fallen in love with her.

Full of hope and joy he threw himself into the cab beside her, and as soon as the vehicle had started he raised her in his arms, took hold of her hands which were cold, and discovered as he pressed her to his heart, that her own scarcely beat. He called her by her name; she did not reply. "She is suffocating," he said to himself; "it is this horrible mask." And he attempted to unfasten it, as he had already tried to do in the magician's cave at the Tivoli Gardens.

But the mask was skilfully made, and the fastenings were firm. Fabien's fingers were not strong enough to break them. Still it was necessary to give Stella some air. He remembered that he had a dagger about him with which he had provided himself before coming to the theatre. Fabien was determined never to be arrested, and had always taken the precaution of arming himself when he saw that there was any danger of the police interfering with him. The blade of the dagger was very sharp, and it was in fact a weapon such as a man carries who is determined to defend his life and liberty. The young conspirator had but one movement to make to

cut the cords which secured the mask, but his hand faltered. A hideous image rose before his mind, that of Stella, with a disfigured face. "What if I should be horrified," he muttered, "and cease to love her?" And at the thought he involuntarily shuddered. "No," he resumed, excitedly, "I shall not recoil from her—if I abandoned her I should be a coward."

The dagger did its work, and the mask fell. But at the moment when he was about to gaze upon the face he had worshipped, and of which no trace might now remain, he once more hesitated. Stella's head rested upon his shoulder, and her long hair, unbound, concealed from him this face which he trembled to look at. She had not yet returned to her senses, but was already breathing more freely, and had given a long sigh. She would soon open her beautiful eyes.

With a trembling hand Fabien put back her long tresses, and summoning all his courage he looked in her face. The vehicle had crossed the boulevard, and was now rolling along the Rue du Temple, which was very badly lighted.

The shops, which were for the most part closed, furnished no light; the street-lamps hung at fifteen feet from the pavements, and gave but a flickering, uncertain gleam. Thus it was not quite dark in the cab, nor was it light.

Fabien's eyes strove to penetrate the partial obscurity, and he beheld Stella's face, pale like that of a ghost, indistinct like the vapour that rises in the evening and disappears at dawn. It seemed to him for an instant that it looked as it had once looked, and in this *chiaroscuro*, favourable to illusion, his imagination made her seem to him even more beautiful, and of a more touching and more striking loveliness. Then again, it seemed to him as if she were dead, as if he held but a corpse in his arms. Then finally, a gleam, at once extinguished, crept into the cab, as the latter passed under a street-lamp, and the image of Stella, alive and superb, appeared, only to vanish again.

Fascinated by this deceptive change, trembling with fear, and wild with hope, Fabien bent over the young woman, looking more closely at her and striving to find out the secret which the darkness still hid from him. The supple form which his arms embraced was now returning to life. Fabien bent forward once more; he inhaled Stella's breath; their lips almost met when a flash of light penetrated into the cab, which at this moment passed very close to a chemist's shop, still lighted up. It was but a flash, but it aroused Cecilia d'Ascoli. She opened her eyes; she gave a cry, and raised herself; and then tearing herself from Fabien's arms she carried her hands to her face. She had recognised the Viscount de Brouage. "Ah!" she murmured, "I am lost! he cannot love me now!"

Her heart had betrayed itself. What she had said amounted to a confession of love for Fabien. She strove to recall it however, and asked in a stifled voice: "Why are you here? What has happened? Why am I here with you?"

"You were about to perish, crushed by the crowd. Heaven permitted me to be near you."

"And it is to you that I owe my life, then? Ah! why did you save me?"

Fabien was already at her feet. "In order that I might dedicate my life to you," said he with a burst of passion, "and serve you, adore you on my knees. You cannot repulse me now, you will not drive me to despair!"

"I begged of you to spare me an affront. I had sworn to keep that mask always upon my face."

"I removed it because you were stifling for want of air. But you are free to put it on again, and, masked or not, to me you will always be Stella Negroni."

"You have seen me, and yet you love me still!" exclaimed the young woman.

"More than I have ever loved you," said Fabien, covering one of her hands with kisses.

With the other one, Cecilia hastily brought over her head the cape of the cloak which Teresa had succeeded in throwing over her shoulders before they had left the box at the theatre. Her features were now completely hidden, and, thanks to this sheltering drapery, she somewhat recovered her self-possession. "Where are you taking me?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"To my rooms, and then I will take you to Brouage, whence we will sail for England."

"To your rooms? I will not go there!"

"You will not! You wish to part from me when a miracle has brought us together? Ah! I thought that my love had at last touched your heart, and that you would not refuse to be mine forever."

"Listen to me," said Cecilia with an emotion which she did not attempt to hide. "I should tell a falsehood if I said that I am indifferent to you. I owe you my life, and the only joy that I have known since the fatal night when I sacrificed my beauty—I can now almost hope that I do not fill you with horror—be blest for not flying from me after seeing my face! But you must listen to my request."

"Speak! whatever you bid me do, I will do."

"I ask you to take me home, and to promise not to try to see me for the next ten days."

"Ten days?"

"In ten days, I will receive you, I swear it to you, and if your own feelings have not changed, I shall be ready to leave the country with you."

"This is a test; you still doubt me."

"No; but I beg of you to submit to the conditions which I make, and not to require me to tell you why it must be so."

"I have sworn to obey you," replied the Viscount de Brouage, who saw that the resolution taken by the young woman was irrevocable, and leaning out of the cab, he called to the driver to change his direction and proceed to the Faubourg du Roule.

"Thanks," said Cecilia, quietly, "now I trust you."

Fabien did not reply. He was too much disturbed to find words for utterance. The visions which he had beheld returned to him. He seemed to see two Stellas, one such as he had caught sight of for an instant, pale but still beautiful, and the other with a livid, scarred countenance, such as he fancied he had beheld at the moment when she had recovered her consciousness. And he asked himself which of these was really Stella herself.

XV.

WHILE Cecilia d'Ascoli was meeting with this adventure, Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélér and her father had the good luck to be pushed out of the

theatre into the street, where they emerged without further accident from the crowd. Teresa, violently parted from her mistress by the throng, had remained near the chevalier, who would, it must be said, have proved but a poor protector, had not his daughter been at hand to stimulate his zeal.

Octavie had made up her mind to become better acquainted with the masked lady, so she took good care not to lose so fine a chance for obliging her in the person of her maid. She immediately made an offer of her services to Teresa, who was lamenting in Italian over her separation from her mistress. Saint-Hélier went to see if he could find her, and while his daughter and Teresa were waiting for him in the carriage which he had hired for the evening, he hastened about in every direction without finding out what had become of the young foreigner.

No one could give him the slightest information; no one, not even a commissary of police, whom he found drawing up a report of the serious contest which had taken place. This magistrate had already a list of the names of the wounded royalist combatants, and of the principal culprits in the fray. As for the crushed and stifled people, he knew nothing about them, and did not appear to care for them.

So the chevalier returned without learning anything whatever, and Octavie thought that the best thing that could be done was to take the maid to the Faubourg du Roule. The golden-haired beauty considered that now or never was the time to gain an entrance into the house inhabited by the masked millionaire, and even to obtain a firm foothold there, if, as she hoped, the interesting heiress reappeared. She presumed that some one would find her in the crowd. A woman is never lost in Paris—in that sense at least—when she is either pretty or rich, and the young foreigner was at least well off.

Greatly disturbed by the disappearance of her dear mistress, and knowing Paris but little, for she seldom went out, Teresa allowed herself to be taken back to the faubourg. Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier tried to make her talk on the road, but did not succeed. The maid, who was extremely discreet under all circumstances, pretended that she only understood and spoke French with great difficulty. Although Octavie asked her many questions, it was not that she suspected the masked woman of being a conspirator or wished to know whether she had anything to do with the Carbonari or not.

Octavie did not care for politics, all her interest lay in being beautiful, and fascinating men by her beauty; in which she certainly succeeded to perfection. Still she did wish to find out the true source of the young foreign lady's wealth. Marcas had announced that he should soon return. He would be greatly in the way of certain plans, and might come upon her like a bomb, at the very moment when a new prospect opened for her. Octavie had taken it into her head to be the wife of a peer. She had long been working at this scheme, and since Count René had been cast off by his uncle, she no longer cared to marry him, but wished to marry the Marquis de Brouage instead.

The Marquis had just been deserted by his only daughter, and was left alone in the world. He must naturally be greatly irritated against his whole family. Octavie determined to fascinate him, to complete the conquest which she had already begun at the interview they had had together; and so as to act freely, she wished to keep Marcas away, and she hoped that the masked lady with the large fortune would rid her of this dangerous gallant when he returned to ask for a reward for the sword-thrust he had given to René de Brouage.

A surprise awaited the chevalier's ambitious daughter at the end of her drive to the Faubourg du Roule. Her carriage had just stopped before the door of Cecilia's house, and she was endeavouring to induce the maid to let her go in with her, for she greatly wished to see the house, when the cab which contained Cecilia and Fabien drove up. Octavie saw the Viscount de Brouage, whom she immediately recognised, alight from it. She always knew when her enemies were near at hand, and he was one of them. Finally the foreign woman alighted in her turn assisted by her deliverer, and holding her mask to her face with one hand, while with the other she arranged her hood in such a way as to hide her countenance completely.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier guessed that Fabien de Brouage had helped the masked lady in the crowd, but she did not conjecture that René's brother had long been acquainted with this woman. Still she would have given a great deal to see what the viscount meant to do, without appearing on the scene herself. Unfortunately for her plans, Teresa saw her mistress and hastily left the carriage to go to her. Octavie could not now conceal her own presence, and so she and the chevalier alighted. Their advent interrupted Cecilia and Fabien in their leave-taking. The viscount, surprised and annoyed by the sight of these people who seemed to start up at every turn in pursuit of the woman he loved, took an abrupt leave of Stella, and returning to the cab, drove off, with an abundant store of hope to comfort him, and yet regretting that he had not warned Stella against the chevalier and his daughter.

Cecilia allowed him to depart after thanking him audibly for the great service which he had rendered her, for she foresaw that some danger might arise if she allowed it to be seen that she had had any past acquaintance with M. de Brouage. She was overjoyed at the sight of Teresa, and after expressing the warmest gratitude to those who had taken care of her faithful attendant, she briefly related the story of her own rescue, saying, that a "brave gentleman" had succeeded in bringing her out of the crowd. She then congratulated Octavie on her own escape, and made a polite answer to her overtures; but she did not promise to receive her; and they finally parted, shaking hands very warmly. "Till we meet again," said Octavie, as she re-entered her carriage, for she was determined to cultivate the masked woman's acquaintance.

The Place Royale was at a long distance from the Faubourg du Roule, and during the drive the chevalier and his daughter had abundant time for converse. However, Octavie was at first lost in thought as to the very unexpected occurrence which had wound up this exciting evening, and she asked herself what it meant. She was inclined to think that M. de Brouage had matrimonial views with regard to the masked heiress, and realised that the latter was well disposed towards him; still she said to herself that Marcas was a man to rid himself of this rival just as he had rid himself of René, and knowing the student thoroughly, she concluded that an obstacle would be an additional attraction to him.

Saint-Hélier was thinking of other things. His daughter's eccentricities troubled him but little, for he was used to them, still, quite recently he had had occasion to talk to her with great severity, which she had resented. Without showing her the original of her letter to Marcas—he did not wish to own that he was the director of the Dark Room—he had accused her of compromising herself with the young secretary, to which Octavie had replied, that she was perfectly indifferent to Marcas, and that she was not the kind of woman to commit herself with any one. In saying this she did

not speak altogether falsely. Her father was somewhat re-assured by her declaration, and said no more. He knew that she never acted without a serious motive, and he did not fear that her heart would ever lead her astray. He had greater fear of the mischief which might result from her inordinate ambition. The lofty views which she sometimes confessed she held, terrified him, and being unable to restrain her, he wished at least to point out certain dangers to her. The moment was a good one for a few sagacious remarks, for he was about to make a great effort to secure a fortune for his audacious heiress, and without confiding his grand project to her, it was necessary he should tell her something of his intentions. The masked woman and Fabien did not interest him in the least, for he had not the faintest suspicion that they were in any way connected with the hidden millions. The idea had not entered his mind to connect the name of "Fabio," with that of Fabien.

Moreover the events of the evening had not greatly excited him. Bernaville's gossip had amused him, but he did not attach the least importance to anything the journalist said. He had not troubled his head about his neighbours in the next box at the theatre, and had only protected them to oblige Octavie. Loquetières' conduct had seemed strange to him, but he thought that the spy's movements had been necessitated by his duties. The only thing that disturbed him was that letter which a stranger had given to the editor, and which the latter had brought to Octavie. He conjectured from whom that missive had come, for the story concocted by Octavie had not deceived him. So it was upon this subject that he began to preach a fatherly sermon just as his carriage, which was going along the Boulevard, reached the Porte-Saint Martin. "My dear daughter," said he, abruptly, "you should tell your correspondents to choose their messengers better. Bernaville is very talkative and will, perhaps, report it everywhere that people write love-letters to you, and that you read them without showing them to your father."

"What does that matter?" replied Octavie, quietly.

"That letter came from Marcas," resumed the chevalier.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier hesitated for a moment, and then unconcernedly answered: "Yes, this letter came from your private secretary, whom I asked you to dismiss."

"And then asked me to retain. I don't know where he now is, and I don't wish to know, but I must warn you that it is not my intention to take him back."

"You will do right to close your doors to him."

"I shall certainly do so, and I wish him to cease his improper correspondence with you."

"He won't write again. This letter is the last that I shall receive from him. You may rely upon my word."

"I do. You are my daughter. Good blood cannot go wrong. So I rely upon your common sense, and leave you entirely free. But I must give you some advice and tell you some news."

"I shall follow your advice. What is the news you wish to tell me?"

"The news and advice are connected together. I know what you are aiming at. You made no mystery of it to me, and I should not disapprove of your scheme to become a marchioness if I thought that you had even a shadow of a chance of success. I am not even opposed to your making the attempt, because I am sure that you will not go about it in the wrong way.

But I advise, or rather beg of you, to do nothing about the matter for a week or two."

"But why delay?"

"Because—I am now coming to the news—I am going to absent myself for a fortnight."

"This is the first time that you have left Paris since we have lived here," said Octavie, more surprised than affected at the thought of her father leaving her alone.

"And it will probably be the last, for if I succeed, I shall have no further need to run after money. If I am going away, my dear child, if I have made up my mind to leave you alone, it is because I have almost a certainty that the journey will make us millionaires, yes, possessors of more millions than one."

"Can't you tell me anything more than this?"

"Not now. Later on, and very soon, you will know everything. And you will be rich, richer than the highest noblemen, do you hear, so you will no longer think of marrying an old general simply because he has two or three hundred thousand francs income. What is your opinion? Isn't this hope worth your abstaining, until my return, from any step that might commit you? Isn't it better to hold off any one who might venture to make love to you, including Loquetières? There now!" added the chevalier, "a proof that the old saying is true, and that when one talks of a wolf one hears him snarl—there is Loquetières over there, he is going home on foot with an old gentleman, a stout lady, and a little boy dressed as an artillery soldier. Why does he associate with such people as those?"

Saint-Hélîer, in order to see his friend the better, leaned out of the carriage, which had now turned down the Rue du Temple to reach the Place Royale.

However, Octavie did not at all worry about her elderly admirer. It mattered little to her whether he went home alone or not, and she did not even take the trouble to reply to the chevalier's remarks. "When are you going away?" she asked, without looking into the street.

"As soon as I can. I have a written leave of absence in my pocket, but I have not yet made all my preparations."

"You needed a leave, then, to go away? You are not free to do as you please, it seems."

"No," replied the Director of the Dark Room with some embarrassment. "I have duties which earn us a living, and a good one. However, I have never spoken of my occupation—one which I have had ever since our return to France—because it was useless to do so, and because I thought that you had guessed what it was."

"I have never tried to guess what it was."

"That was right! Curiosity is a great fault, and discretion a very good quality. You are discreet and you are not inquisitive. I recognise myself in you. I have a salary, and even a large one—the King, when he recovered his throne, did not forget that I had sometimes been very useful to him during the Emigration, and so he provided for me; he put me at the head of a private post, a confidential one, and I may say that, during the seven years that I have occupied these functions, I have justified the choice which His Majesty made of me. However, I was obliged to take what offered, and there are certain posts in the service of the state which bring a man more money than respect, hence it is that—"

"I only wish to know one thing," interrupted the golden-haired beauty.

"I wish to know whether your real position is known to a number of people."

"To four persons only: the King, one of his ministers, and two directors. The three clerks whom I have under my orders don't count, and my superiors are as much interested as I am in keeping my secret."

"They won't betray it, then?"

"Not under any circumstances."

"Even if a man of high position should make inquiries about you?"

"Less, then, than ever."

"But if you retire, what then?"

"If I retire, I shall be replaced, I don't know by whom, but I am sure that my name won't be told to my successor."

"That suffices," replied Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier.

"I understand. You wish to make certain that the functions which I exercise won't cause the marriage, which you are thinking of, to fall through. On that point I will quiet your anxiety. Before a month has elapsed, I shall send in my resignation, because I sha'n't need a situation. We shall be rich, immensely rich, and you can marry whom you please. It is with this hope that I urge you to be very prudent during my absence. Don't promise your hand to anyone, I beg of you. You would only regret it later on. With the fortune which I shall bring you we can cut a dash in London, and you can marry a lord, if you like. I say in London, because I shall, perhaps, be obliged to go for some time to England, after my enterprise succeeds."

"Ah, indeed!" said Octavie, calmly, for she was quite determined to remain in France.

"I can rely on you, then, can I not?" asked the chevalier. "You will promise me to be even more careful than usual, and to seclude yourself during my absence as though you were in a convent."

"I do that now."

"Yes, I know it; you lead a life that is by no means gay, and the friends whom I receive are not entertaining or pleasing to you; but be patient, your trials will soon be at an end. I want you to be rewarded for your self-sacrifice; I want you to outshine other women by your splendour as you already do by your beauty; and when you are reigning over the aristocratic society in which so far you have been refused a place, your old father will feel proud of you; he will enjoy your triumphs, and be happy in your happiness, for he loves you and you only."

Although the chevalier had stooped to the unworthy position of a government spy, he was not speaking falsely in saying all this. He adored his daughter. His degraded mind was filled with thoughts of her. And he had his own way of loving her. He loved her because she was like himself. Her audacity, ambition, and partiality for intrigue, were all inherited from him. He had trained her as he would have trained a son destined to succeed to his own position. That is to say, that he had never strengthened her against temptation. He thought her mind strong enough to govern her passions, and to love not well but wisely. His dream was to make a "great lady" of her, and he relied upon her aid in attaining that aim. "I have suffered for years," he added, "and so have you. We have justly earned a right to success. We shall be able to look down upon the nobleman who thought that it would be too great an honour to admit you into his family. You are as good as he, although you are poor. Your mother was a Bragadini; her family were Venetian patricians, and had fleets of their

own when the Brouages were only country people, pottering about the marshes in Saintonge."

Octavie did not reply; she listened attentively to this arrogant speech, and resolved to call it to mind when she needed to do so; not in England, however, for she in no wise shared her father's dreams, thinking it more secure to pursue a plan which she had long dwelt upon, than to rely upon obtaining some imaginary millions.

"When I think," exclaimed the enthusiastic chevalier, "that Loquetières actually had the audacity to offer himself, I can only laugh! What a face he will make when I tell him that you are not for him! By-the-bye," added the chevalier, "he will certainly call to inquire about me, while I'm away! You must say that I have gone to Burgundy to receive a legacy. He won't believe it, but no matter; and if he should call again, pray say that you cannot see him as long as I remain away."

"There isn't the smallest necessity for asking me to do so. The man is repugnant to me, and if I ever consented to see him, it was because you almost insisted upon it."

"I shall not insist upon it again, you may rest assured of that. Loquetières is no longer fit company for us. I only regret that he was present when Bernaville handed you the letter. He is very bitter, you know, and he has an evil tongue."

"I will prevent him from talking."

"And if I see him before I go away, I shall ask him why he left us at the worst moment of the crush, to escort that fat woman with whom we saw him near the Temple." At that moment while Saint-Héliér was announcing his intentions with regard to his friend, the carriage stopped on the Place Royale. The conversation came to an end. The coachman called out for the door to be opened, and the chevalier and his daughter entered the house and repaired to their rooms, Octavie to ponder over her proud dreams, and her father to dress himself, for he was about to repair to the Dark Room for a final visit, and had to assume his usual disguise.

Loquetières, whom Saint-Héliér had just alluded to, was not at all thinking of the chevalier, for, on his side, he had just had what almost amounted to an adventure.

He had not, in the first place, found the commissary of police at the theatre. Everything was in confusion that night at the Panorama Dramatique, and no one had remained at his post. So after vainly endeavouring to join the magistrate with whom he wished to confer before drawing up his report, Fouché's pupil made up his mind to leave the place, but he didn't find it easy to emerge from a theatre where every exit was obstructed. Loquetières had had a great experience of crowds. He knew that to avoid the danger of a throng the best way is to take one's time, and as he did not care to join the chevalier, he simply went to the dress circle with the intention of remaining there, quietly, till the exits were free. He ran no risk, as he was far from the crush, and beyond the reach of the struggling politicians, who were fighting together in the pit and stalls. He took his seat and had a fair view of the more or less agreeable sight afforded by the fray below and the deserted boxes. Above there reigned emptiness and silence, below there was a throng and a tumult. Loquetières gazed absently at the strange picture, but suddenly by the dim light of the chandelier, he saw near him a group which parodied the famous scene of the "Deluge," painted by Girodet Frioson, and the great success in the fine art exhibition of 1806.

A remarkable stout man was standing up clutching the railing of a box, and drawing towards him a woman as corpulent as himself, who held by the hand a child as round as a dumpling. The two were greatly agitated and giving vent to lamentable sounds. The child was crying, the woman calling for help, and the man seemed to have lost his head, for instead of repairing to the door of the gallery, he seemed bent upon forcing his way through a square opening which would not have allowed any man of his size to pass. Loquetières was of a compassionate nature, so he went up to the terrified group and politely said to the bewildered citizen: "You are mistaken, sir; you are taking a box with a grating before it for an exit, and I assure you that you are wrong to be so much alarmed. No one will come here to disturb you, and the rioters will soon be quiet. Do as I do. Wait till the crowd has left the theatre and then go out quietly."

This sensible advice quieted the fat citizen, who was no other than Corporal Boulardot. "Thanks, sir," he replied, flushing and attempting to assume a somewhat less ridiculous attitude—"I believe that you are right. It is my wife who is frightened. Let go of me, Pamela! Adolphe, stop your noise!"

These observations were addressed to his wife and daughter, and took effect, for Madame Boulardot sunk down upon a seat, while the youthful Adolphe stopped yelping. The corporal of the 6th Legion then hastily arranged his disordered attire, and, to hide his confusion, began to talk confusedly: "What has been going on is outrageous, sir! The stalls were full of people bent on making a riot. They began it all. I saw it. A peaceful citizen can't come to the play nowadays with his family without being exposed to the violence of the satellites of the government. But I will point out these abuses; I will write to the *Constitutionnel*. You will see that I shall, for no doubt you subscribe to that paper like myself."

"No," replied Loquetières, "but I read it at the café."

"At the Café de Foy, I suppose? It seems to me that I have had the pleasure of seeing you there."

"I sometimes go there."

"Yes, yes; now I remember you! We went there one evening, some of my comrades and I, to take some supper, for our captain had been promoted, don't you remember?"

"Perhaps I may, but still—"

"Ah! you don't recognize me because I had my uniform on then."

"Wait!—yes—I remember you; you were talking about the woman with the death's-head?"

"Exactly. And we talked about the Shrove Sunday affair also, the night when the patrol and I arrested the Count de Brouage—he was carrying a sedan-chair, which contained the corpse of his cousin; but he was set at liberty all the same; that's what it is to be a nobleman."

Loquetières' memory returned to him. He remembered having listened to such a conversation, and not having given it a thought. Still, as he never neglected a chance of prying into anything, and could at that moment afford to lose his time, he amused himself by making Boulardot go on with his gossiping. However, he did not learn much, and, besides, he was obliged to put up with the society of the druggist and his wife on the way home, when they were at last able to leave the theatre, after waiting for three quarters of an hour.

Boulardot lived in the Rue Aumaire and the Rue Aumaire was on the road to Loquetières' residence on the Place Dauphine. They walked

along, and when they had crossed the boulevard they turned down the Rue Charlot, then into the Rue de Bretagne, and still continued chatting. At the moment when they reached the corner of the Rue des Enfants-Rouges, Boulardot suddenly stopped, and pointing to a high wall, said to Loquetières: "I regret, sir, that it is so late, for this wall surrounds a garden of mine, where I could have offered you a seat and some beer."

"Thank you," replied Loquetières, who only longed to get rid of the ridiculous druggist; "beer does not agree with me."

"Oh! that is no matter! If you will do me honour to spend some evening with me, I can give you better refreshment than that. I have a certain currant-wine made by my wife, and—"

"Some other time, I sha'n't refuse; but to-night, I confess it, I long to be in bed."

"So do I," said Boulardot, very decidedly. "The sad sight which we saw affected me. Men fighting like that is frightful; it reminds one of the worst period of our history. I was less shocked when I saw the corpse of that unfortunate young man in the sedan-chair."

"The fact is, that was a strange occurrence."

"And one which no one has ever known the truth about. Would you believe it, sir, the police has never been able to find the place where the general's son was killed. I shall never get it out of my mind that there has been some connivance between the police and the murderer."

"That is very unlikely," replied Loquetières, who knew all about the matter.

"Well, well! I know what the police is worth. It only arrests liberals. I should like to know if you think there need have been much trouble to find out the truth of this matter. The police only had to search Paris for a narrow street, a high wall, and a small door."

"Oh! but they might have been mistaken. *Your* garden seems to be separated from a narrow street by a high wall with a small door."

"That is true, and that animal, Brassicourt—he is a national guardsman in my company—declares that the Count de Brouage must have been killed in my garden. He might as well say that I gave him his sword-wound."

The spy did not reply. For the last few moments he had been looking rather than listening. Boulardot had stopped short at the corner of the Rue des Enfants Rouges, near a blind alley, which has now been swept away to make room for the Square du Temple. His famous garden extended over the ground covered by this square, and Loquetières was suddenly struck by the appearance of the locality, which reminded him of what René de Brouage had related,

The high, black-looking houses, the lofty wall, the narrow and badly lighted alley, all tallied with the count's description. He was surprised that this coincidence had not struck him before, for on visiting the neighbourhood of the Temple after the murder, he had more than once passed by this spot. However, he had only visited it by daylight, and this corner of old Paris had nothing sinister in its appearance then. The houses, which were occupied by working people, did not look like the abodes of cut-throats. There was merry singing going on in the rooms, and children played together at the foot of the wall. Matters changed, however, at night time when all was still: but a single lamp dimly lit up the street, and the blind alley was dark and foreboding in aspect.

"One would swear that the man with the sedan-chair must have met the count here," thought Loquetières. "If I brought Monsieur de Brouage

here at this hour, I am sure that he would remember the spot. But I have other matters on hand now, apart from clearing up that old affair ; still, a little questioning is never useless, it may serve me later on, and I will get all that I can out of the old druggist."

"You see how foolish Brassicourt is," resumed Boulardot. "My garden is not let, and no one has entered it for the last three months. I might have let it to a kitchen-gardener—but with my income I don't need to do so, thank Heaven !—and I prefer to have the enjoyment of coming here to take the air in the evening with my wife and child."

"Why," said Loquetières, who was now beginning to recognize the locality more fully, "your garden seems to be next to the old buildings of the Templars' Convent?"

"It is, and the buildings belong to me. My father bought them at the time of the Revolution, when the Republic sold the church property. They are not worth much, and yet last year I had an opportunity of letting them to a manufacturer—a Freemason whom I knew in the Friendship Lodge—and he made a store-house out of them, and has a lot of merchandise there; however, the garden is still mine, and I have a right to walk about it."

"I congratulate you. I see that you have some splendid trees, for they show above the wall. It must be pleasant to sit under their shade."

"It is a perfect Paradise, especially in the summer—the old buildings make it a trifle damp; those old monks used to erect fortresses instead of houses. They didn't care to have people prying into their affairs. However we are now in June, and the dampness doesn't amount to anything—you shall see for yourself, my dear sir, you shall see, if you will call on me some evening next week ! I will invite some of my comrades in the 6th—Brassicourt will come, you know, the man who declares that my garden is the place where the crime was committed. I will show him plainly how mistaken he is. He is a very pleasant man to know, however, and we shall enjoy ourselves very much."

"I accept your offer with pleasure."

"Then we will set a day, shall it be—but what is the matter, Paméla, what are you nudging me for?"

"You know," replied the stout wife of the stout druggist, "that you haven't even got the key of the garden."

"True ! I had forgotten that ! Just fancy, sir, that three months ago I lent it to a brother Freemason who belongs to the Friendship Lodge, and he has not yet returned it to me, although I took the trouble to write to him for it."

"He must be a very forgetful sort of fellow. What the dickens did he want with your key and your garden?"

"Oh, between ourselves, I suspect him of using it to make appointments. At his age all that men think of is making love, you know !"

"Is he so very young, then?"

"Twenty, or twenty-two at the most. He is a student. His name is Victorin Marcas. But do you know him?" added Boulardot, who remarked that his new acquaintance had started at this name.

"It seems to me that I have heard the name, I can't tell where," replied Loquetières, who thought that he was not obliged to say anything more. In point of fact he felt overjoyed; he would have paid dear for such information as Boulardot had unintentionally given him for nothing.

He was now beginning to understand the behaviour of Marcas, whom he detested, and he decided to carry on the inquiry to the bitter end.

"This Marcas really abuses your good-nature," he said aloud. "To keep the use of your grounds entirely to himself, for three months—"

"More than three months," interrupted Boulardot. "The monthly supper of the brethren of our lodge takes place on the 2nd, and he borrowed my key on the 2nd of March, one Friday. I remember it well."

"Then it was two days before Shrove Sunday, which fell on the 4th this year, I believe?"

"Exactly. I have every reason to remember the date. It was the day when I arrested that Count de Brouage, whom the government saw fit to set free."

"In your place I should force Marcas to restore that key."

"I have done all I could to get it back. I sent one of my clerks to his house in the Rue des Grès; but his landlord said that he was travelling; Heaven only knows when he will return, and I think that I may as well bid good-bye to my key for good. After all, I have only to tell a locksmith to make another."

"Or ask your tenant to let you pass through the convent," replied the spy, who, without seeming to do so, was collecting all the information he could get at.

"My tenant does not live in Paris. He only comes here twice a year to pay his rent."

"Indeed! Why the merchandise that he has stored in the convent buildings must be spoiling, with no one to look after it."

"That is his lookout, not mine. Besides, I presume that he has a clerk who attends to the matter; but I don't know where he lives, and I shall not run after him, or Morlier either. Morlier is my tenant's name. It is much easier to have a key made, and if you will dine with us on Sunday next, we will take our coffee under the very elm-trees that formerly shaded the Templars at their orgies."

"That would be a great treat, my dear sir; but just now I am thinking of leaving Paris for a few days."

"Everybody is going or gone, it seems to me," said Boulardot, laughing; "but what is deferred is not lost. We will put off the dinner until your return."

"That is agreed, then, and now let me take leave of you and of Madame Boulardot, for if I am not mistaken, here is the Rue des Gravilliers, and you live, I believe, in the Rue Aumaire?"

"At No. 75, where I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you, my dear sir."

"The pleasure will be on my side," said Loquetières, blandly.

They separated at the corner of the Rue du Temple, which they had now reached without knowing it, so interesting had been their conversation.

Boulardot was delighted with his new acquaintance, and Loquetières congratulated himself greatly on having entered into relationship with the owner of the garden, where Marcas must have indulged in more than one strange performance. The conversation had been so animated that the spy had not remarked that his friend, Saint-Hélier, passed by in his carriage, just as he was turning into the Rue de Bretagne. Boulardot went away light-hearted, and did not dream that he had just revealed a very important secret to a government spy; and Loquetières on his side was well content, but very busy in his own mind and much perplexed.

He did not doubt but what he had discovered, at once and by a happy chance, the murderer of Count Henri de Brouage, and the headquarters of

those ever-flitting conspirators, whom he had been in search of since the Baroness de Casanova had disappeared. A few words imprudently spoken by an uninterested person, had sufficed to put him upon the track, for he did not believe in the supposed love affairs of Victorin Marcas, or in the "merchandise" stored by a "dealer from the provinces," in the ruined buildings of the old Commanderie of the Templars. Formerly—and even the night before—had he learned what he now knew, he would have acted upon his information at once. Marcas and the Carbonari would have been in a dangerous position, for he would have pounced upon them.

However, Loquetières was now lost in other thoughts. The confidential communications of Fabien de Brouage to the masked lady were still before his mind. He was ever thinking of the millions which might belong to any man skilful enough to find them, and daring enough to carry them away, and as he desired nothing so much as wealth, he asked himself which was the best way to win it. The treasure of the Carbonari tempted him, but the seizure of that treasure offered great difficulties and necessitated somewhat complicated preparations. It was much more easy to arrest a gang conspiring in the very heart of Paris, and with it the man who had killed the son of the Marquis de Brouage; but unfortunately that exploit seemed likely to prove more famous than lucrative. Loquetières would have sent Marcas to prison with genuine delight, simply because the student made love to Octavie; still he would have experienced much greater pleasure on obtaining possession of the heaps of gold.

It thus resulted that, as he went down the Rue du Temple on his way home to the Place Dauphine, he resolved to think first of the millions. There was no hurry as to the rest. He had made an appointment a week ahead with Boulardot, and it was not likely that the Carbonari would abscond before then, as they did not dream of any danger threatening them.

On the other hand, Marcas had left Paris, and had certainly not gone to see his father. It would be wiser to await his return than to run after him. So Loquetières made up his mind to begin by the conquest of the Golden Fleece.

He would need several days to prepare for the expedition, for he had but a vague idea of the course to pursue. He did not even know exactly where to look for the millions in question, although he already believed that he would find them in Saintonge. Having decided upon his course, he hurried on to the Place Dauphine, where a surprise awaited him. At ten steps from his abode, he was accosted by a detective, who brought him an unexpected order from the director-general of the police of the realm.

XVI.

GENERAL DE BROUAGE had been cruelly tried during the last three months. This nobleman, loaded with honors, and upon whom fortune had always smiled, was now expiating as it were his past triumphs and prosperity.

In life as at cards, there are continuities of luck or ill-luck—"series," to use the technical term. After a brilliant beginning, the marquis was now entering upon a disastrous "series," of which his son's tragic death had been the prologue. And the King, on being told of his misfortunes, could not say to him, like Louis XIV. to old Marshal Villeroy, after the defeat at Ramillies: "At our age one no longer meets with any good fortune;" for the ex-colonel of the 9th Dragoons had never lost a battle, and he was not

yet sixty. He did not appear to be even fifty. On horseback, at a review, he looked superb; in the Chamber of Peers, he seemed a very aristocrat. Years and campaigns had neither diminished his vigour, nor impaired his fine bearing. He had remained as stately as though he had always been at court at Versailles, instead of passing fifteen years in camp life. However, grief kills as certainly as bullets do, and the general had been twice wounded in his affections. Henri, his only son, the hope of his house, had been killed at twenty-four, leaving no heir, and to the grief of losing him was added the probability that the family of Brouage would become extinct. Of his two nephews, the last of their name, one was unworthy of perpetuating that illustrious race, for he had denied his caste, so to speak; and the other had estranged himself by declaring that he wished to take a wife from a family inferior to his own.

If Count René had proposed to marry Antoinette, the Marquis would perhaps not have refused his petition, although the marriage was not such as he had hoped for her. Still René was the son of the marquis' brother; he would one day be the head of the family, and the blood of the Brouages had never been dishonoured by him. So the only real obstacle that had existed to this well-assorted union was the love which Octavie had inspired in René's heart. Now this sufficed to make the general—who would surely have yielded to the entreaties of Antoinette had her cousin sought her—this sufficed to make him close his doors to a nephew who wished to marry beneath him.

After the stormy scene in which René had positively declared that he would enter Saint-Hélier's family, the general had thought of marrying again so as to hand down his title as a marquis, and his dignity as a peer in a direct line. He would certainly make a much more agreeable husband than many an embassy attaché, or sub-lieutenant, and he might justly hope that Heaven would grant him an heir. Still he thought that Antoinette did not deserve that he should place her under the authority of a stepmother—always a painful affair to a young girl.

The most peculiar point in the affair was that he had said all this to himself on the day after his almost impassioned interview with Octavie. When he had looked into his own heart he was forced to admit that it had grown old. It was still very susceptible, so much so, indeed, as to make him run into danger. The general had been a gay man, and the punishment of those who have loved too much is to go on loving up to the last day of their lives. He knew that men like himself had often been punished by the course which they had pursued, and although he had not yet grown aged, he dreaded the infatuation which old men habitually pay so dearly for. And, besides, he mistrusted his own nature which was apt to mislead him, and so listening to experience and the fear of ultimately doing something absurd, he had at once renounced his matrimonial views and cut short his acquaintance with the siren of the Place Royale. Still his remembrance of her was a pleasant one. Her beauty had dazzled him, and he was obliged to admit that from Seville to Moscow, by way of Paris, he had never met with so marvellous a being. Her skilful flattery had so agreeably tickled his vanity that he had almost lost his innate acumen, and had begun to believe that like himself, Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier had "blue blood" in her veins.

However, he no longer went to see her, or even thought of women in his own society who would prove good matches. His only desire was to find a good husband for Antoinette, sufficiently rich, and disposed to assume the

name of Brouage, which would thus be handed down to his children. This last point especially preoccupied the marquis, and constituted a somewhat serious impediment which he had, however, time enough to ponder upon, as his daughter could not marry till her year of mourning was over.

Such was the position of affairs, when one morning in the month of June, the maid, who attended Mademoiselle Antoinette, suddenly entered the marquis's room, with a terrified expression of face. She brought with her a letter which she had found in her young mistress's apartments. The marquis read this letter, which was addressed to him, and found that it contained merely these words: "Pardon me; I am going away. It must be so. I shall soon return and throw myself at your feet and tell you what necessity I have yielded to. I still hope that you will not curse me."

Thereupon the general was seized with such a fit of anger that he came nigh to having an attack of apoplexy. It was but too true. Mademoiselle de Brouage had gone out on foot the evening before, towards nine, with Miss Elizabeth Tufton, and had not yet returned. The doorkeeper of the house thought that she had gone, as she often did, to pray at the church of Saint-Louis en l'Île, and had not noticed that the governess carried a rather large travelling-bag.

When the marquis's fury was to a certain extent subdued, he started inquiries in his own house as to what had taken place prior to this strange flight, and how it had occurred. He learned that Antoinette had received a letter by the post two hours before her departure. This was nothing unusual, for she kept up a correspondence with a friend who had been at the same school as herself and who lived in the country. Then he found that the drawer of the rosewood desk in which she kept her pocket money was empty. She must have taken several hundred louis with her. That night M. de Brouage had gone after dinner to inquire about one of his colleagues, who was suffering from a violent attack of gout. Antoinette had left the house during his absence, and as she had bidden him good night, when he left the dinner-table, he had not inquired after her on his return.

Thus all had taken place in the simplest manner imaginable, and the rapidity with which the rash project had been executed denoted firm resolve and forethought. M. de Brouage was right in this view of the matter, and did not hesitate to attribute it to the pernicious influence of Miss Tufton. She alone could have made Antoinette believe that decisive moments existed in a woman's life when she must choose between "vain social prejudices," and "the duty which her heart laid upon her." She alone, by her ridiculous discourse, could have misled her young pupil to such a point as to make her forget what she owed to her father and to herself. The general now reproached himself with the mistake which he had made in giving Antoinette an "English education," and his weakness in retaining the dangerous and foolish old maid in his house. But the evil was done; the harm was irreparable. How could the disappearance of a young lady belonging to high society be concealed? The servants were devoted and discreet, but Antoinette had friends whom she saw every day, and who would not fail to be surprised at her absence, even though the latter were transient. M. de Brouage realised the full import of this deplorable event, and like the inflexible soldier that he was he said to himself: "It is all over now. I have no daughter left."

He had never compounded with disgrace, and was not a man to allow his honour to be stained. The first day after the sad news was a frightful one

for him. He was like a wounded lion. But by night his resolve was taken. He swore he would never again see Antoinette, and without reflecting that the "old system" no longer existed, he decided that she should go into a convent as soon as she reappeared. As to the sentimental Betsy, he relied upon being authorised to send her to Calais between two gendarmes, and put her on board an English packet, so that France might be rid of the languishing old pest forever. However, to execute these firm measures, he must first find the fugitives, and he did not know where to look for them.

The freak could only have been caused by love, a thwarted passion, and Antoinette had never loved any one but her cousin, who did not love her. Could she have gone to throw herself at his head, as it were, at the risk of being repelled by him? M. de Brouage shrank from believing that his daughter had stooped to such a course. He wished at any cost to rescue her from the dangers of all kinds into which she had rushed so madly, for it was useless to endeavour to keep down his tender feelings; he was well aware that his fatherly heart had little in common with his pride. So he instructed his faithful servant, Pierre Dugué to make prompt inquiry in the neighbourhood, and also at René's rooms in the Rue d'Artois.

Dugué learned little or nothing. No one had seen Mademoiselle de Brouage or the Englishwoman pass by, and as for Count René, he was not in Paris. He had gone away at the end of May on a journey, telling his doorkeeper that he would soon return, but without saying where he was going. Under these circumstances the conclusion to be arrived at was that Antoinette had not been carried off by her cousin, as he had left Paris before she did, still she might have gone after him.

To put an end to his cruel uncertainty, the general resolved to apply once more to the powerful personage whom he had already consulted under delicate circumstances. He went to the director-general of the police service, Baron Mounier, and told him his sorrows, well knowing that he could not place his confidence more safely or find a more sagacious adviser. The baron was deeply interested in the marquis's troubles, and promised to help him to all the extent of his power, which was great.

His view of the matter was that it could not be anything more than a simple freak on the part of a rash girl, and that it was all-important to act quietly in order to avoid a scandal. He thought that it would be easy to find out what had become of Mademoiselle de Brouage, and bring her quietly back, but he did not conceal from the general that he would be obliged to take the police into his confidence, as searches of this kind were made by the detective agents.

The general returned from his visit, not consoled, assuredly, but somewhat encouraged by what his worthy colleague in the Chamber of Peers had said to him. Unfortunately, however, he did not take so mild a view of Antoinette's levity. He did not admit that a Brouage should compromise herself, and was more than ever determined to take severe measures with the transgressor on her return. His idea of marrying now came back, and after deciding that he would not pardon his daughter, he swore to himself that he would marry, if only to prevent his name from dying out. He still hoped that it would not be disgraced, and that Antoinette's recklessness might be kept secret if it could soon be repaired.

If he had known that the news had already gone abroad, and that an editor was already busy circulating it in the public lounge of a Boulevard theatre, he would no doubt have taken prompter measures, and loudly declared his intention of casting off a daughter unworthy of him. But he

knew nothing of what was going on outside, having seen no one except the statesman to whom he had applied. His servants took good care not to tell him that the whole neighbourhood was already aware of what had happened. They showed the most respectful attention to their master, who wandered about his vast deserted abode, alone with the portraits of his ancestors, calling aloud upon his murdered son, and cursing his rebellious daughter.

General de Brouage had been struggling with his grief for two long days, when Pierre Dugué came to tell him that a messenger from the prefect of police wished to see him. This messenger was Loquetières, who would willingly have declined the honour done him by his superior in sending him upon this errand. On the night before, just as he had reached the door of his house, with his head full of golden dreams, a police agent had accosted him, and handed him a letter stating what had occurred, and giving him orders as to what he had to do. He was told in a few words all that concerned Mademoiselle de Brouage, and ordered to place himself at the general's orders, to make the necessary search. The idea was not a good one, and the director-general had certainly not expected this course of proceeding; but his subordinates never departed from the usual routine, and they could think of nothing better than to send a spy to this unhappy father, grieving over his daughter's disappearance—and what a spy, the same man who had declared that he would find Count Henri's murderer, but had never done so.

Pierre Dugué neglected to tell his master that the visitor was the same man whom he had formerly nicknamed "the green coat." In fact the worthy steward thought that the marquis was prepared, and showed Loquetières into the drawing-room without announcing him.

M. de Brouage had consented to receive his visitor, thinking that the head of the police service had sent one of his secretaries to him, and he was very disagreeably surprised on recognising the individual who, three months before, had come to him under such painful circumstances. "What do you wish?" he asked, harshly.

"You are, perhaps, not aware that I have been sent to you, Monsieur le Marquis," replied the spy without being disconcerted.

"By the prefect, yes. But you may retire. I am not at all disposed to make use of your services."

Nothing could have given Loquetières more pleasure than this dismissal, for he had come greatly against his will. He much preferred setting out in quest of the treasure to running after Mademoiselle de Brouage, but he was not free to choose, as he still belonged to the police service, and did not wish to quarrel with the government yet awhile. However, delighted as he was, he still felt forced, for form's sake, to protest.

"I merely came because I was ordered to come," he said, humbly, "but if you do not wish to employ me, Monsieur le Marquis, I will go. However, may I ask in what way I have displeased you?"

"I am surprised that you should put that question to me. You undertook three months ago to find my son's murderer. You then boasted that you would give him up to justice, and declared that you were sure of laying your hands upon him in a very short time. Your promises were mere talk."

"I beg of you to remember, Monsieur le Marquis, that everything was against me in that business."

This reply irritated M. de Brouage still more. "That business!" he

repeated, indignantly. "You dare in my presence to call the pursuit of my son's assassin a business?"

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Marquis, I merely made use of our usual professional phraseology."

"Pray don't treat me to the police vocabulary, and tell me what I wish to know. What have you done since you took the direction of the search? I have received from your superiors and yourself twenty reports full of talk, but not a single serious word."

"I have the honour to inform you, marquis, that one of the indications sent to you was of great importance. A corporal of the 2nd Swiss Regiment had been killed in a duel by a sword thrust in the eye. I said from the first that the count's murderer would again make use of this secret, dishonourable lunge."

"And the inquiry into the tavern-fray did not have any result. You could not find out whom this soldier had fought with any more than you could find the woman who kept the gambling-house, into which my unfortunate son was drawn. Your investigations have been simply absurd, and your skill is but assumed."

"You are very severe, Monsieur le Marquis," replied Loquetières, calmly; "you do not understand the difficulties in the way, difficulties which time alone can remove."

"Time! It is now a hundred days since you began your investigation, and you know no more than you did on the day after the crime was committed."

"I know a great deal more, Monsieur le Marquis."

"What do you know?"

"I know where the murder was committed."

"You know that, and you have done nothing? You did not even tell me?"

"I learned it but a few hours ago."

"Speak then! tell me where my son was killed."

"In a garden at the corner of the Rue des Enfants-Rouges, and a blind alley."

"And the man to whom it belongs has not yet been arrested?"

"No, for he is entirely innocent. It is he who called my attention to the place. Yesterday, at a little before midnight, we were crossing the Quartier du Temple. He showed me a high wall, and a small door, and I was at once struck by the appearance of the place. Your nephew, Monsieur le Marquis, described the scene to me exactly, and I wish to take him there. He will recognise this spot at once, beyond a doubt."

"Count René de Brouage is not in Paris."

"That is a pity, a great pity, but no doubt he won't long remain away, and as soon as he returns—"

"You are going to wait till he does, then, before acting. Upon my word I think that you are deriding me!"

"Heaven forbid, marquis! I have already acted, and I have collected a great deal of information. The garden in question was formerly attached to the Temple. It was sold during the Revolution as national property, and now belongs to a man named Boulardot, who was at the head of the patrol by whom Count René was arrested when carrying the sedan chair—"

"But, in that case, I must have seen this man. He came here with two other men of the national guard."

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis, and it is impossible to suspect him. An

alibi would suffice to prove that he had nothing whatever to do with the crime. Still, through him I shall certainly find the culprit."

"Explain yourself. I do not understand you."

"Well, Boulardot has lost the key of his garden gate. He lost it early in March. This key was found, and used to open the garden. Boulardot found the marks of footsteps. He knows that persons enter his grounds, but he does not know who they are. I have the belief and almost the certainty that the duel took place there; that Count Henri's antagonist has the key still in his possession, and that he often enters the garden at night-time. What is his purpose? On this point I can only resort to conjecture, but I believe that the old buildings of the Temple Convent serve as a storehouse for a band of coiners or conspirators, to whom this wretch belongs."

"Well?"

"Well, marquis, I have decided to have a new key made without the knowledge of Boulardot, and I shall enter his grounds with some men, to whom I will give the necessary orders. They will be on the watch every night, and they will arrest whoever makes his appearance. I have strong reasons for believing that the murderer himself will be soon caught in this trap. However," added Loquetières, looking stealthily at M. de Brouage, "it is of the greatest importance that the utmost secrecy should be maintained as to these steps, and that I should stay in Paris to do all that may be necessary."

"There is nothing to prevent that, it seems to me."

"Certainly not, if you don't need my services in any other way, marquis, and don't wish to employ me to find Mademoiselle de Brouage—"

"I repeat that such is not my intention," replied the general, curtly. "I don't wish any detective to be employed in the search. I will see the Prefect of Police to-day. My wishes have not been understood. I wish information to be obtained by correspondence. I don't desire that the same measures should be taken to find my daughter as would be used to track a criminal. I have spoken plainly, and I want you to confine yourself to pursuing your discoveries, which seem to me to amount to less than you presume."

"The end will show you, marquis, I trust, that you are wrong in your opinion. I ask merely a few days more to succeed; but I have a request to make."

"What is it?" asked M. de Brouage in a haughty tone.

"I don't want the Prefect of Police to be informed of the plans which I have just spoken of. If my chiefs were informed of what I know and intend doing, they would send other persons with me, and I wish to work alone to ensure the success of my plan."

The general frowned. The spy's request seemed to him an impudent one and he was disposed to dismiss him without a reply, for he had very little faith in his new promises. He decided, however, that it would be as well to let him act as he wished. "So be it, then," said he, "I shall not speak of you except to ask that you may not be charged with the search for my daughter. But I warn you that if your tricks don't come to anything, I shall consider that you have been making game of me, and take measures in consequence."

"You seem to be prejudiced against me, Monsieur le Marquis; but I will remove your prejudices."

"Enough! I will wait ten days. After then, I shall complain of your incomprehensible delay. Still, if what I don't expect should happen, and

you deliver up to me the man who killed my son, I will give you a large reward. Go, now, go !”

Loquetières bowed in the most respectful manner and was retiring, when M. de Brouage suddenly called out, “You say that the garden is in the—”

“Rue des Enfants Rouges, a somewhat narrow street which cuts across the Rue de Bretagne. The blind alley where the small door is situated has no name, but it is easily to be found. There are some old houses on one side of it ; on the other side is the garden.”

“That will do.”

Loquetières considered himself dismissed, and went away delighted. He had fully attained the aim of his wishes by telling some huge falsehoods. In stating to the general that Count Henri de Brouage had been killed in Boulardot's garden, Loquetières had said what he thought, but not all that he knew. The count's antagonist had been Marcas, of that he was fully convinced. The key had not been lost and found by an unknown person. It had been lent to the student, on the Friday before Shrove-Sunday, so the student alone had been able to penetrate into the garden. But Loquetières wished to keep this valuable information to himself, and that for many reasons. In the first place he did not wish to have Marcas arrested before chatting with Saint-Hélier and Octavie. The denunciation of Victorin was a card which he thought it as well to keep in his hand, to reserve it like an unforeseen home-thrust to be made use of only in case of need, for instance if his chase after the millions failed, whereupon he would be glad to bring about a triumph in his profession as a police spy and win a large reward.

He had aimed still more particularly at the result which he had just attained. He wished to be rid of a mission which would prevent his searching for the gold. If he had known that the marquis was opposed to detectives searching for his daughter, he would not have taken the trouble to arrange the story of the garden and the key. But M. de Brouage had not clearly expressed his feelings in the matter till the conversation was about to end.

At present Loquetières was protected against all the eventualities which he had dreaded, and felt happy. He no longer feared that the Prefect of Police would refuse him a leave of absence on account of the marquis, as the latter declined to make use of him, and he could rely upon the ten days' grace he had promised before making any complaint, besides being able to do as he pleased with regard to Corporal Boulardot during the same lapse of time. This delay permitted him to take the measures which he contemplated with regard to the treasure and complete them entirely, and he had still the prospect of consoling himself for failure in this respect, by apprehending Marcas, the object of his aversion.

“The general won't break his word ; he will say nothing,” thought the happy detective as he trotted along the Quai d'Anjou. “Nothing more keeps me in Paris. I must start in forty-eight hours' time.”

“No,” said M. de Brouage, as he paced up and down the floor, talking to himself. “I will not allow that fellow to look for Antoinette. I would rather never know where she has gone.”

He stopped short in his walk and in his soliloquy. The door had been softly opened by the old steward, and a veiled lady slowly advanced towards the amazed marquis.

“It isn't she,” he thought, meaning his daughter, and as the stranger raised her veil, he exclaimed : “You here, mademoiselle !”

The veiled lady was no other than Octavie de Saint-Hélier.

The chevalier's daughter that day was utterly unlike herself. Not that her face was changed. Never had she appeared more beautiful. But she no longer had the lofty air which usually gave her so queenly a look.

Her eyes no longer sparkled, and her hands—truly patrician in their beauty—trembled; she looked as though her heart were beating to suffocation, and her voice failed her in explaining the purpose of her visit. This assumed emotion, if such it were, was so well feigned that the general was completely deceived by it. A man may have led squadrons to the assault of Borodino, and have endured the atrocious sufferings of the retreat from Moscow, yet he may be a mere craven when in a woman's power. The brave fellows who defy cannon fear tears, and two big tears shone upon Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier's long eyelashes.

When M. de Brouage recognised the golden-haired beauty, he at once drew himself up, like a soldier who is surprised by the enemy, but it was vain for him to try to assume indifference, for the emotion which he saw on Octavie's face disarmed him at once. "Compose yourself, mademoiselle," said he, going toward the beautiful young creature who appeared to be about to address some petition to him. She did not reply, but tottered, and the colonel and peer of France at once supported her. His arm which had so bravely wielded the sword surrounded the supple waist of this lovely mourner, and sustained her till she was seated in an arm-chair which stood near by.

She assumed without any effort an attitude of the utmost grace, and a soft and touching look from her tearful eyes thanked the Marquis de Brouage for helping her. She had the good fortune not to fall and the good taste to refrain from fainting. She now even found strength to speak without waiting to be questioned by the father of Antoinette.

"Pardon me, marquis," she murmured, "pardon me for presenting myself here in this manner—"

"I have nothing to pardon, mademoiselle," said M. de Brouage courteously: "I can only thank you for having sufficient confidence in me not to flinch from a step which fools might perhaps blame, but which I admire, as I am sure that there is a serious cause for it."

The mau of the world was already reappearing. Coolness soon returns to men who have passed the age of fifty, even were they sub-lieutenants in their early days. Octavie had no difficulty in putting herself upon her guard—she had, in fact, never been off her guard—but she had the art to appear greatly disturbed, and to stammer out a reply which, had she so chosen, she could have made with perfect ease and without stammering at all. "If I had hoped that you would consent to visit my father's house again," she said with apparent effort, "I should not have come here; I would have written to you to ask you to—"

"It is much better as it is, mademoiselle," replied the general, without taking the pains to disguise the small degree of respect which he entertained for the chevalier.

This somewhat rude reply placed Octavie entirely at her ease by allowing her to drop the part of an ingenuous timid girl, which was suited neither to her nature nor the character of her beauty. "You are right, Monsieur le Marquis," she replied, "it is not for you to forget that you are a great nobleman, and to lower yourself. It is my part to do my duty in spite of prejudices which, I confess, it costs me something to brave. Still I will

fulfil that duty at the risk of irrevocably compromising myself. It is the glory of women to sacrifice themselves to—"

"The man they love," said M. de Brouage, gently. "I know that, but I did not know that you had a passion for doing your duty."

He was standing before Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélér as he spoke, and in replying looked at her with a fixedness which would have disconcerted a woman who had less self-command. "Be kind enough to listen to me, Monsieur le Marquis," said the chevalier's daughter. "You have not, I presume, forgotten that a month ago you honoured my father, who was absent, with a visit, and that I had the honour of receiving you?"

"Certainly not. I have not forgotten it, or the errand that caused the visit either."

"I remember it also. You came to tell me that you had forbidden Monsieur de Brouage, your nephew, to marry me, and I replied that the interdiction was unnecessary as I did not love him."

"That is true. I did justice at the time to the plainness of your language."

"But you did not believe me."

"You are mistaken. I did believe you, and I believe you now. You gave me reasons for your course, which I perfectly well remember."

"You also said to me: 'If you don't love Count René, it is because you love another.'"

"Yes, and I have since regretted having spoken in a manner so unworthy of you and of myself."

"You went still further, marquis. You asked me whether the man I loved was my father's secretary, a young man who was in the room when you came in."

"And you very earnestly protested against the supposition, which was, I am sure, erroneous. It even seems to me as though I can hear you protesting now. But allow me, mademoiselle, to ask you why you recall all this?"

"To justify myself completely in your eyes."

"Justify yourself! I have never doubted your assertions, and, besides, I am not your judge."

"It suits me that you should be," said Octavie, slowly. "It suits me that you should have the proof that I have not stooped to lie, and that my heart beats with a nobler love. I have brought you that proof."

M. de Brouage started. This singular discourse troubled him. He felt emotion stirred within him, the same fires which the eyes of the golden-haired beauty had kindled one fine day in May, when, half reclining upon the divan in her father's study, she had related, in her ardent and harmonious voice, how from her childhood up she had taken an impassioned interest in the heroic colonel of the 9th Dragoons. At the same time, he foresaw a danger, perhaps a snare, under these warm protestations which seemed to him to have some hidden purpose. Still he felt that Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélér had not come to him to let him see that she would prefer him to the lovers whom she repudiated. The demeanour, the tone, the look of this strange and splendid creature were not calculated to lead him to suppose that she had come to throw herself into his arms, however great a nobleman he might be.

"I wish to prove to you that I have told you the truth, and I also wish, whatever it may cost my pride, to expiate an involuntary wrong by confessing a misfortune which I have caused, not intentionally, but in fact."

"Express yourself more clearly, I beg," said M. de Brouage, startled by this alarming preamble.

"You shall know all, marquis, and I hope that you will not mistake the feeling which actuates me. If I have made up my mind to speak at the risk of cruelly wounding you, it is because I am solicitous regarding your honour, and I wish that you should give me your esteem."

"My honour!" repeated the general, ready to revolt.

"This secretary of my father," began Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, "this Marcas, whom I detest, dares to love me."

"She must be insane," thought M. de Brouage, who could not see the smallest connection between his honour and the more or less audacious behaviour of Marcas, the secretary.

"He dares to love me," repeated Octavie, "and he has taken it into his head to suppress all the persons whom he suspects of being in love with me. He is extremely jealous respecting me, although I have repulsed him with scorn. He imagined that Count René was his rival, and made up his mind to kill him."

"But he did not kill him, I presume?" interrupted the general, impatiently.

"He has challenged him, fought with him, and seriously wounded him."

M. de Brouage turned pale. René was his brother's son, and he had formerly entertained a sincere affection for him. However, he nerved himself against a feeling which he thought a weakness. "I pity my nephew," said he, endeavouring to appear calm, "but I blame him. If he had always acted as a gentleman should act, he would not be reduced to crossing swords with a fellow who is probably a professional bully."

"This bully is also a most reckless man, for he has written to me to boast of having wounded Count René, and to tell me that Count René did not love me, and never loved me. To revenge himself for my disdain, he dared to send me a letter, which I have burned, but of which I remember the wording: 'You loved him, but you must know that he only pretended love for you so as to hide an intrigue with another woman, a young girl, who is rich and noble; this young girl adores him, and indeed on learning by a note which he sent to her that he was wounded, she left her father's house to go to him, and she is with him now, so that if he dies his last kiss will be hers, and if he lives it is she whom he will marry.'"

"A young girl!" exclaimed M. de Brouage. "What is her name? You know it, no doubt."

Octavie stood upright, and laying her hand upon her heart, she said in a husky voice: "I ask pardon of Heaven for the harm which I have unintentionally done. If I could have supposed that Count René was acting a part with me, I should at once have ceased to receive him, thereby putting a stop to the jealousy of the scoundrel who has murdered him—"

"The name!" repeated the general in agony; "tell me the young girl's name!"

"And on the day when you came to forbid my marrying your nephew, I should have thrown myself at your feet to entreat you to consent to the marriage of Count René and Mademoiselle Antoinette de Brouage."

"I had already guessed it," said the marquis, in a hoarse tone; "it is he who has brought dishonour into my house—he whom I treated as a son. Not content with seducing an unfortunate girl, he has tortured her by leading her to believe that he was not thinking of marrying her; he has

employed the tricks of a Lovelace to bring the mad passion which he has inspired to a climax. Ah ! it is too infamous !”

“He has expiated his fault,” said Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier. “He will repair it. Heaven will not suffer him to die.”

The general made a gesture of fury, and asked in a broken voice : “Where is he ?”

“I do not know. Marcas did not tell me where he committed his crime ; I do not know where his letter was written. It was brought to me by a strange man.”

Since Octavie had begun relating her skilfully arranged narrative of what had occurred, this was the first time that she had told the exact truth.

“I should not have believed the assertions of this man,” she resumed, with increasing emotion, “and certainly I should not have ventured to present myself before you, to tell you what I had learned, if chance had not caused me to hear remarks publicly made about—”

“About my daughter !” roared the general.

“Yesterday,” replied Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, lowering her voice, “in the saloon of a theatre, where I went with my father, I heard loud talking about the disappearance of Mademoiselle de Brouage.”

Octavie spoke these last words in a trembling voice. This was the decisive blow : she had reserved it till the last, and had the art of letting it seem as if this confession, which so admirably served her purpose, was actually torn from her. “Then,” she resumed, “I thought of what her father must suffer. I thought that it would be of little consequence whether I injured my own reputation or not, providing I enabled the Marquis de Brouage to put an end to the scandal which is about to stain the honour of his name. My hand would not have ventured to write what my lips have dared to speak. I have had the courage to come here. I shall be slandered. There will be I don’t know what shameful things attributed to me ; I expect that, still I shall console myself for the misfortune if you but do justice to the feelings which have led me to pursue this course.”

“You are a noble woman,” rejoined the peer of France, taking both of Octavie’s hands in his own and pressing them warmly. “I thank you, and I swear to you that from this moment you have a defender on whom you may rely.”

“Ah ! I can brave the whole world now,” exclaimed the golden-haired beauty ; “what matters the world to me if you are with me ?”

“Yes, I am with you, and I hope soon to prove to you all the gratitude I feel. At this moment I must take steps—I must, above all, put an end to an intolerable situation. The King himself is interested in preventing a member of the Chamber of Peers from being disgraced by an imprudent girl and an unscrupulous young man. The guilty shall be punished. As for slanderers, I know how to silence them.”

“Why punish those who love one another ?” said Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, in her softest voice.

“As to that, I alone have a right to decide,” replied the general. “Those who have basely wounded my heart have ceased to belong to my family. They do not deserve that you should intercede for them.”

Octavie made an inimitable gesture—a gesture that expressed infinite compassion for the lovers and a tender sympathy for M. de Brouage, who had cursed them. Then bringing her veil down over her face, she turned to leave.

"One word more," said the marquis. "If this man Marcas returns to Paris—and he will return, will he not?" Octavie nodded as if to say that he would do so. "If he returns, will he present himself at your house?"

"If he does—and he may—I shall dismiss him at once," replied Made-moiselle de Saint-Hélier. And her emerald eyes glittered beneath her veil. The noble soldier bowed low before the chevalier's daughter, and said, as he led her to the door of the drawing-room: "You will soon, I hope, do me the honour of receiving me."

XVII.

DR. SAUJON, the surgeon of the royal navy attached to the Rochefort hospital, was a skilful practitioner. He had not continued his studies long, having been sent out with the republican fleet when his first student year was over; but just as a man, by dint of working as a blacksmith finally learns to be one, so by performing operations, M. Saujon had become a surgeon. He had performed his first amputation under the enemy's fire between decks on board the ship *Les Droits de l'Homme*, and had succeeded very well, for although he lacked scientific knowledge, he had rare skill and remarkable coolness. Medical practice, apart from surgery, was not his strong point, but he had no equal for extracting a ball or cutting off an arm, and all the firing in the world did not prevent him from handling his surgical instruments with the utmost coolness.

During the first ten years of his career, he had almost always been at sea, still he had profited by the little leisure he obtained to perfect himself in an art in which he had already acquired considerable skill. The treaty of Amiens enabled him to study for a time at the Montpellier college; and the French fleet having been annihilated at the battle of Trafalgar, where he was wounded by a splinter of wood, which he extracted from the calf of his leg with his own hand, he was then able to pursue his studies in Paris, and obtain a diploma there, without which, up to that time, he had, nevertheless, succeeded very well in his profession. He went through the campaigns of 1812 and 1813 with the marines of the Imperial Guard; and the fall of the Empire brought him back to Rochefort, which was his birth-place, and where he wished to remain, having no further desire to continue serving actively, now that the white flag had taken the place of the tri-colour.

Saujon had remained a warm admirer of Napoleon, and a thorough Republican, two forms of opinion which did not blend very well, but which he mingled together with the same audacity as he showed in writing a prescription. He continued serving the King, because he was not rich, never having had anything but his pay to depend upon, and never having made any charge to his town patients; still he desired to retire from the navy as soon as possible, and in the meantime, did not hesitate to express his views as regarded the Bourbons. He was let alone, however, as he was greatly liked, and considered altogether inoffensive.

He conspired a little, however, inasmuch as he had become a Knight of Liberty, and had an important grade among the freemasons, still his dignity did not prevent him from attending the poor without charge, and often paying for the making up of the prescriptions which he gave.

It was on this worthy man that Victorin Marcas called one fine evening in May, mounted upon the *grev mare* belonging to the postmaster at Sur-

gères, and having a deep wound in his shoulder, a wound inflicted by the sword of René de Brouage. Saujon was very much attached to Jacques Arvert, the old grenadier, whom he had known and cured of more than one sabre cut in Russia and Germany. He went to see him from time to time at the hamlet of the Ile d'Albe, and invited him to dinner whenever he met him at Rochefort.

Marcas could not, therefore, bring any better recommendation than that of the old trooper, and was received like a man who shared the same political views, which is to say, like a friend. The doctor found a lodging for him at the house of a chemist, who was also a Bonapartist, and dressed his wound with great care. It was more serious than it looked. Fatigue and the ride in the sun had inflamed it, and René's triumphant foe was laid low with fever, and kept in bed for days, the surgeon being unable to tell him how long his illness might last. Finally, however, he contrived to write to Octavie.

He did not dare to break the promise he had made to Jacques Arvert. He gave the surgeon a short account of what had happened at the old soldier's house, and said that the latter begged of him to go there without delay. He added but little as to what had occurred before the duel, merely admitting that politics had had something to do with it, and that it was important that it should be kept a secret matter.

The doctor agreed to go to Arvert's. To oblige a friend and to perform an operation, this was quite enough to make him set forth at once. After ordering Marcas to remain quiet, and to drink some cooling draughts, he set off, mounted upon a fine white mule, which a tradesman of La Rochelle had made him a present of, after being cured of a broken leg. It was a fancy of Saujon's that a sailor never ought to ride a horse, and so, like a Spanish priest, he always rode a mule. The serviceable animal in question had a good easy pace, and in two hours' time brought his master to the Ile d'Albe.

Jacques Arvert had treated René like a skilful practitioner, and his soldierly method was highly approved of by the doctor. The count had not long remained unconscious, but he was none the better for that. Saujon examined the wound, sounded the patient's lungs, and then said that he could not yet give a decided opinion. There was no important lesion, he thought, but the sword had grazed the pleura, and fatal hemorrhage might at any moment set in. He had hopes, however, as the patient was young, healthy, and strong. In a week's time he would be out of danger, providing he survived that length of time. Having given his very unpromising view of the case, and encouraged the wounded man by some kind words, the doctor took Jacques into the lower room, and asked for some particulars of the occurrence. The old soldier's narrative was not over favourable to Marcas, and when the surgeon knew that the wounded man was the nephew of General de Brouage, his sympathies turned from the vindictive student to the suffering royalist. Saujon had seen the general under fire, and forgave him for having become a peer under Louis XVIII., as he had served Napoleon so well. Besides, the name of Brouage was popular in Saintonge, and, like Jacques Arvert, Saujon's local patriotism was well developed.

The result of the conference between the two friends was that they agreed to do all they could to save the life of a native of the province. The grenadier undertook to do the nursing, the surgeon undertook the cure; it was understood that Jacques should remain at the sick man's bedside, and

that Saujon should see him every evening. To do this it was necessary to ride eighteen miles every day, but the white mule was able to accomplish the trip, and the doctor did not spare the animal any more than himself.

As for the needful secrecy, they did not fear that it would be infringed. Arvert had no neighbours but some poor peasants, who liked and respected him. The local rural guard had served "the other one," and was not hostile to the old soldier. The gendarmes, who were less favourably inclined, did not care, however, to meddle with him. Indeed, he gave no cause for complaint, but lived like a peaceful, well-disposed citizen in easy circumstances, cultivating his flowers, picking his vegetables, and making his soup, and paying his taxes, so that the authorities could not annoy him, although he voted the wrong way. No one crossed his threshold without his permission, and he might have had ten wounded men in his house without any stir arising, that is, thanks to his friend Saujon's help.

Everything went well, and nine days after the duel René de Brouage sat up for the first time. His youthful vigour and Jacques Arvert's skill as a nurse, did more to save him than the physic brought by the good doctor and made up by the druggist, with whom Victorin Marcas lived. René was allowed on that day to speak for the first time, on condition that he did not talk too long. Jacques had given him his own bed, and was "camping," in a manner, in the lower room. The windows overlooked the garden, and the wounded man could see the tops of the cherry-trees under which he had fought.

He had left his bed with Jacques Arvert's assistance, and was seated in an old arm-chair, on which the soldier had placed some pillows to make it more comfortable. The sun was setting, and the doctor, who had come early, was about to set off again. Although they were in the middle of the summer, the weather was almost chilly. A sharp western wind was driving great black clouds before it, and the dampness from the sea pervaded the locality. Saujon had declared that an even temperature must be kept up in the room, and Jacques had found some wood which he was piling up in the fire-place before setting it alight. Pale, emaciated by severe diet, and weakened by his long sojourn in bed, René de Brouage was looking attentively at the doctor, who was feeling his pulse and nodding with a well-pleased look as his patient awaited the final decision.

"Well, young man," said Saujon, gaily, "you will see your sweetheart once more. All is going well. The healing is going on satisfactorily, and I anticipate a good result; but you must be prudent, or everything will go wrong again. You must keep quiet, and take all the rest you can. You must eat but little, and talk less; that is the programme. But I will not oblige you to keep silent altogether. You have permission to thank our friend Jacques. He may boast that he fished you out of deep waters by sheer strength of will, for without him you would have sunk out of sight. Come, Jacques, your fire is made, and you may as well make ready to receive this gentleman's thanks."

Jacques had just set the wood alight after piling it up with the skill of a man who has made many a bivouac fire. He rose, and said to René, taking his hand: "No thanks required. I am only too glad to have brought you round. We don't serve in the same political regiment; but you are a brave fellow, and that suffices."

"I shall never forget that you have saved my life," said the young count, in a faint voice; "you and your friend together."

"All right! never mind all that," muttered Saujon. "It is my business

to save people's lives, but Jacques used to learn how to kill them. His cure will be put to his account, up above, to make up for all the heads that he has split in the course of his career."

"Will you allow me to ask for news of my adversary!" said René, who had thought of Marcas more than once during the last few days.

"You noblemen are all like that!" exclaimed the doctor. "You are always displaying your generosity as at Fontenoy. What the devil do you bother yourself about that fellow for? He gave you a bad wound. You gave him a pretty good one; so you are quits. But if you really care to know how he is, I will tell you. He is able to go about, and is only longing to return to the capital. But I hold on to him, and sha'n't let him break from his moorings before the end of the week."

"That is all that I wished to know," said M. de Brouage in a low tone.

"I'll bet there's something else that you would like to find out," said Jacques Arvert, laughing. "I never told you anything about your letter because I did not wish to trouble you; but now I will admit that my friend Saujon, here present, threw it into the post-box at Rochefort."

The colour returned to the wounded man's cheeks, as he painfully articulated: "Thanks!"

"You say you don't wish to excite your patient, and you are exciting him worse than ever!" exclaimed the doctor. "Hold your tongue, old swashbuckler! and come help me to saddle Blanchette. It is almost dark, and by-and-bye the rain will come down hard enough to flood the gun-room of a three-decker. This gentleman can do without you for ten minutes. Come, young man! the cape is doubled, but you must attend to the rudder all the same. You must keep warm, you must rest, and think neither of your lady-love nor your enemy—you mustn't think about anything, in fact; that's the best way, and then we shall soon put into port."

As he spoke, the worthy doctor gave his patient's shoulder a friendly tap, and took Jacques Arvert away to saddle the white mule. René remained alone in the room, which was growing darker and darker, for night was near, the wind from the sea was blowing with a mournful sound, and the rain was beginning to beat against the window-panes. The count, with his head resting against the back of the arm-chair, gazed absently at the dancing flames of the fire. The doctor had ordered him to keep from thinking, and he tried to doze, but his troubled mind constantly turned to the absent ones. "Shall I ever see them again?" he thought. "Ought I to wish to see them? Would it not be better to die here, and now?"

While he was dreaming thus, he suddenly beheld a strange sight. In the middle of the fire burning upon the hearth, there had appeared an inscription in white letters between two large tears, an inscription which read: "Died at twenty-four."

René thought at first that he had really seen nothing, that it was a mere hallucination. He was too much weakened to control his thoughts, but not enough to be unaware of the condition to which loss of blood and a low diet had reduced him. He fully understood the effect that his illness produced, for he had felt it before beholding this strange sight. He had seen indistinct figures float before his eyes, first Octavie de Saint-Hélier, then Antoinette de Brouage, and he knew that this phantasma was the work of imagination. Then the thought of death, imminent death, had risen in his brain, and he had then seen the mournful inscription in the midst of the flames, and seeming like a warning. "I must be dreaming," he thought. "My poor head has gone astray."

But he still gazed at the hearth, and the appalling words were still visible in white letters upon the dark wood-work of the fire lighted by Jacques Arvert. "Died at twenty-four" seemed to René, who had not reached his twenty-fifth year, to be much the same thing as the "Mene, Tekel Upharsin," which had terrified Belshazzer at his feast.

He tried to lean over to see more clearly into the prophetic fire, but his strength failed him, and after a vain effort he sank back in his chair. He then thought that the letters faded away, and that the prediction vanished in smoke. At all events the pile suddenly gave way, and a shower of sparks darted upward.

At this moment the old grenadier returned from helping his friend Saujon to mount his mule. "Well!" he asked, as he re-entered the room, rubbing his hands, "how does my fire suit you? The warmth is nice, isn't it! We did not say that when we were crossing the Niemen, in 1812, and our horses died like flies under the Russian sun. What a rascally country that Russia is! you fry in summer and you freeze in winter. It isn't like Saintonge. Here, in December, a man can dig in his shirt sleeves, and in June, he wants a fire."

"Don't you see anything in the fire?" asked René, in a faint tone.

"What the deuce should I see? The fire is splendid. I chose some old wood that burns like matches."

"Yes, it burns well," stammered the wounded man, who did not speak of what he had seen, or fancied he had seen.

"I must leave you alone with the blaze," resumed Jacques, gaily. "I must go down-stairs to shut the shutters. The rain is falling as though it were being pitched down out of buckets. If the windows below were left open we should be flooded. Ah! the doctor will have a bad time of it. Fortunately he has a cloak and water-proof boots. I came up just to see if you needed me, and as there is nothing to do, I'll go down and barricade our barracks."

René de Brouage did not attempt to detain his host. The effort which he had made, and the emotion which he had felt, had almost exhausted him. He closed his eyes, and again sank into a feverish reverie. Octavie again appeared to him, proud and fascinating as on that fatal day, when in the drawing-room of the house on the Place Royale, he had promised to make her his wife. He thought that he saw her emerald eyes shining, that he heard her impassioned tone; it seemed to him that she was standing before him with sparkling eyes and parted lips. Then, suddenly, the hateful face of Marcas appeared. He seemed to approach the golden-haired beauty, to show her a bloody sword and to kneel at her feet. Octavie seemed to bend over him as she were about to give him his reward.

A sharp sound roused the count from his troubled dream and its painful visions. One of the pieces of wood had snapped asunder, and both portions of the log had rolled out upon the hearth. Then René's ideas suddenly took another turn. He seemed to see the indistinct and wavering form of a young girl clad in mourning, a fanciful ghost-like figure trailing a shroud behind it, and passing a dark forest. At last the figure took a definite shape. René saw it as we see objects in a dream; it seemed to him that it was slowly approaching, and as it did so he recognised the delicate, pensive features of Mademoiselle de Brouage. She was pale, and tears had left their traces upon her emaciated cheeks. A long black veil fell from her head to her shoulders.

"She looks as though she came from some grave side," thought the

young count, with a shudder. "She is dead, perhaps—dead because she loved me. And I am the cause of her death—that fatal letter in which I bade her farewell has killed her." Then he imagined that he saw her hold out her pale hand to him.

"She is calling me!" he murmured. "She is beckoning to me to join her. Ah! may heaven deliver me from this world and unite me to her in the grave!"

The impression was so strong that it roused the count from his disturbed state, and restored him to a sense of his surroundings. His soul, which had risen above earth, returned to its bondage in the flesh; he became a man again, and woke up. However, his eyes, as they opened, lighted upon this phrase written in the fire—a phrase which soon recalled the sad chimeras of his tortured fancy: "Pray for her."

René uttered a feeble cry. "It is true, then?" said he. "This time I am sure that I am not dreaming. Antoinette is dead. I have killed her."

He could not take his eyes off the melancholy inscription glittering amid the flames which were consuming the dry wood. It soon became dim however, the letters disappeared one after another; at last all vanished, and the wounded man could only see the ashes falling into a pile on the hearth. "Yes, I am praying for you, poor, noble girl, whom I cruelly murdered!" he cried.

"Murdered!" cried Jacques behind him. "You! murder a woman? No danger! You could never have done that. The Brouages did not do such things."

"I tell you that she is dead," said the count, wildly, "and that I killed her!"

"Oho! things are becoming bad!" growled the old soldier. "You are getting delirious, it appears to me. I told Saujon that it was too soon to let you get up, but he wouldn't listen to me. He is as obstinate as that white mule of his."

"Tell me once more, don't you see anything in the fire?" asked René, who was still staring at the hearth.

"In the fire?" said Jacques, shrugging his shoulders. "No, certainly not. I see nothing but pine logs, which burn better than beech. They don't burn pine in your uncle's house."

"Don't you see anything? Then I must be crazy!" exclaimed the patient, pointing with a trembling hand at the flames still rising.

"Good! there you go again! May a wolf eat me if I see anything among those half-burnt logs. Wait—let me see!"

"There, in the middle, those white letters!"

Another log had begun to flame, and in time two Latin words appeared—words no more enlivening than those which had just vanished. "*De profundis.*" This beginning of the psalm of the funeral service was distinctly visible between two cross-bones.

"I understand now!" exclaimed Jacques Arvert, with a burst of laughter. "Don't be alarmed, young man! It isn't a summons from the lower regions or anything of that kind. I'm the cause of it all. I was wrong. I ought to have remembered that a wounded man's nerves are sensitive. But who would have thought that it would all reappear like the letters on a convict's shoulder?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that before the Revolution there was a cemetery at the Ile d'Albe. But as no one had been buried there for thirty years, the com-

mune of Muron, which is next to our hamlet, sold the ground, cut down the yew-trees, and removed the crosses which had been set upon the graves. I needed some wood, and I bought the lot without looking at what was on it. But if I had known what these old boards were, I assure you—"

"I understand it now," muttered the count, quite ashamed of his weakness.

"There is no occasion to blush," said the veteran. "There is nothing that gives one the nightmare like a sword-thrust. Do you know that once at Marienwerder Hospital, where I was being tended for a nasty lance-wound that a Cossack gave me in the arm, I was delirious for a whole day. I thought the Russians were trying to force me to eat candle-grease, and I wept like a child; yes, I, Jacques Arvert, quartermaster of the Horse Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard."

René made no reply to this outburst on the old trooper's part. He had shut his eyes, and was thinking of Antoinette de Brouage, whom his imagination evoked as pale as a ghost, and he was repeating to himself: "What if it were true? What if it were no dream?"

"Come, young man," said Jacques, "dismiss all these thoughts. There is some good broth being warmed for you downstairs. When you have swallowed that, I must make you get back to bed again. You will sleep like a marmot, and to-morrow there will be no signs of harm. Your visions will have vanished, and the weather will have changed as well.

"For fate and waves are full of change,"

sang the veteran in a cracked voice. He was, by the way, a passionate admirer of Béranger.

"If I live I shall never forget what I owe to you," said René, whose feelings were deeply touched by the kindness of the old soldier, who had taken as much care of him as a mother could have taken of her son. "I hope that, thanks to you and the good doctor, I shall ultimately recover; still it will take a long while in any case, and as I shall not be able to return to Paris for a long time, I have a request to make of you."

"Do so without hesitation; you may be a royalist, as you are, but the old guard is at your service for all that."

"Well, I should like to write a letter, and I wish very much to have it posted to-morrow."

"Good! just like the other one, the one that Sauvjon posted. You want to tell your sweetheart that you are better, and will soon see her again. I understand all that—and all the better from the fact that your first letter must have read as though it had been written in a graveyard. At your age no one ever fails to write such letters. I myself, when I was a conscript, always wrote to my sweetheart on the night before battle."

The quartermaster, in his soldierly language, perfectly well expressed the feelings of the Count de Brouage. René reproached himself bitterly with having inflicted cruel suffering upon his cousin by telling her that he was near death, and he thought that there might still be time to repair the evil. He wished to ask her pardon for having misunderstood her, to tell her that he cursed the fatal infatuation which had brought him to the feet of an unworthy creature, and to let her see that in the depths of his repentant heart a pure affection was budding forth, as a flower will sometimes bud upon a blasted rock. The terrible shock which he had undergone had carried away the venomous germs that had sprung up beneath the burning breath of the golden-haired siren. Marcas's sword, driven into his chest,

had cured him of all love for Octavie. He reproached himself for having allowed Antoinette to believe that he had never loved any one but herself. His letter had been written in terms which allowed the confiding young girl to retain that illusive belief, and to atone for his fault, René thought himself called upon to tell the whole truth. By confessing past delinquencies, he hoped to avoid danger in the future. He swore that he would be sincere with Mademoiselle de Brouage, and remind her that the general considered himself the master of her inclinations, and would undoubtedly refuse to allow her to marry him.

His reflections were at this point interrupted by Jacques Arvert, who gaily resumed: "It is agreed, young man. Your sweetheart shall hear from you. But you have plenty of time to think of all the loving things you have to say, for our friend Saujon, who will take charge of your letter, won't be here till to-morrow night. Besides, my cemetery wood has curdled your blood, and the best thing that you can do for the present is to go to bed again. I am going after your broth. I will also bring up some peat, which won't sing *De profundis*, and I—"

The old man was interrupted by a sound from outside which reached him through the closed windows. He listened. "That's strange," said he, "bells and a coach—the diligence passed by at least two hours ago—it is perhaps only a post-chaise; no—it wouldn't stop at twelve miles from Rochefort in a place where there is merely a hut for an inn—still it does not seem to be going on."

René listened also, and wondered whether the travellers who were halting at a hamlet of six houses or so had come on his account. "Can any of the peasants around here have betrayed me?" grumbled Jacques. "The Prefect has been looking into matters at Surgères to-day, and he always travels by post. What if it were he? If he took it into his head to send any gendarmes from his own escort here, what then? No, they would have knocked at my shutters by this time. But I must find out what is going on. Don't stir, young man! I'll pop my head out of the window, take a look, and come back again."

René did not desire to stir. The feelings which he had experienced seemed to weigh him down. Although very desirous of knowing the cause of this unusual noise at night-time in the peaceful hamlet of the Ile d'Albe, and anxious, moreover, as to its purport, he could not do otherwise than listen patiently.

The first floor of the house comprised two rooms: the one in which the wounded man sat, overlooked the garden, the other the road. Jacques Arvert had only to open a door to enter the adjoining room, and this door remaining open, M. de Brouage could not fail to hear what went on. He indeed heard Jacques open the window softly, and then some voices from outside reached him. There was loud talking going on, and those who spoke were evidently not very refined people, as they were swearing all manner of oaths amid a continuous snapping of whips and jingling of bells. Could it be a waggon or a post-chaise which had stopped at a place where there were no relays of horses no regular taverns? René could not understand it. However, he presently heard a voice shout out:

"I tell you that it's here!"

"And I tell you that there is no one with me," replied the individual who had been addressed.

"Don't play the stupid!" replied the first voice. "There is a bunch of straw up over your door. That proves that you sell liquor,

and keep an inn, old fellow ! Come, now, open your shop, or I'll break in !"

René understood less than ever. To judge by the conversation, it might be thought that a company of hostile soldiers or a troop of red republicans had come either to pillage the Ile d'Albe, or to search it. However, under his Majesty Louis XVIII. the enemy was no longer in France, and the republicans had laid down their arms.

"Try it !" now replied the owner of the house. "The door is solid, and if you break it down you will have a complaint made about you to-morrow morning. Instead of going on like that, you had better apply over the way to old Jacques. He's at the window now."

"So he is," said the man who had been threatening to break in. And he began to call out : "Is that you, Monsieur Arvert ?"

"Yes, it is I," replied the cooper in his deep bass voice. "What do you want ? Who are you, to begin with ?"

"What ! don't you know me ? I'm Gibou, François Gibou, the Surgères postillion."

"Then you are the fellow who upset the coach last week and killed the courier. Haven't you been dismissed after such a performance as that ?"

"I was discharged, but the postmaster at Muron took me into his employ."

"What can that rascal want here ?" thought the count, who was far from having forgotten the accident, the primary cause of so many mishaps.

Jacques, who was no doubt asking himself the same question, resumed in a rough tone : "What do you want ? Why don't you go your way, instead of waking up decent people who are in bed ?"

"Because I have business here, I tell you !"

"What ! aren't your passengers going to Rochefort ?"

"No. I have orders not to go further than the Ile d'Albe ; that suits me. To-night my animals will have eighteen miles less in their legs, and the whole route is paid for."

"Who have you got with you then ?"

"Why, some ladies, and they don't look at money—double reins, if you please—from Paris all the way."

"Ah ! ladies from Paris ?"

"Oh, yes, they're from there. It's easy to see that. In Saintonge ladies don't wear silk dresses and cashmere shawls."

René, who heard all this, started with mingled hope and fear. Parisian ladies in a post-chaise stopping at this poor hamlet could only have undertaken so long a journey in view of finding some one connected with them. Who were they ? He at once thought both of Octavie and Mademoiselle de Brouage, although it seemed to him impossible that the general's daughter could be running about without her father. Octavie, on the contrary, was fully capable of such a proceeding ; but why should she come to the Ile d'Albe ? René could not imagine that she had come to ascertain whether her homicidal suggestions had been carried out or not.

"Good !" replied the grenadier, "but what do your travellers want ?"

"They want to see a gentleman, who's ill and who's here. He must have caught a fever in walking along by the Charente."

Jacques Arvert asked no more questions. He had concluded that the ladies had come to see his patient. So he left the window, and going into the room where René was sitting, breathless with anxiety : "This is some-

thing new," said he, with a serious air. "Fine ladies from the capital and most certainly looking for you."

"I heard all that was said," replied the count, "and I cannot understand it."

"Well I do! It is your sweetheart. You wrote to her, and accordingly she started off at once, and has come to see you."

"No, no, it is impossible!"

"Young man, you don't know about women. When they really care for their lovers, they will travel hundreds of miles, and more, only to see them, and just as easily as I would swallow a glass of wine. In 1807 I knew a little German girl, who followed the regiment on foot from Cassel to Breslau, because she was over head and ears in love with the trumpeter in our squadron. What shall I say to your Parisian lady?"

"I don't know. I want to be sure who she is."

"That's all right. You don't want to see the first woman who comes along, and I don't blame you. I will go to her, see what she looks like, inquire her name, and come back to let you know."

René did not attempt to detain the old soldier, although he greatly mistrusted his fitness for so delicate a mission; but he had no other ambassador near by, and could not rise from his chair alone. The old soldier rushed down the stairs and went out on to the road, where he found a dilapidated vehicle covered with mud. The post-boy had left his seat, and was talking at the door with one of his passengers, who was speaking to him in a peevish tone, and with a very decided English accent.

"I think that you must be making game of us," she said.

"I! Make fun of a lady who gives three francs to the post-boy? No danger!" replied the fellow, who was so skilful in upsetting his passengers.

"An Englishwoman!" said the old trooper to himself. "That can't concern my young man. I'll send her on her way, that female from Wellington's country."

As he said this he approached the vehicle to see the passengers. Scarcely were his energetic countenance and military bearing in sight than the daughter of Albion called out to him: "Sir, I beg of you to come here and punish this impudent post-boy who is deceiving us. He declares that this is the Ile d'Albe."

"He is not deceiving you. It is the Ile d'Albe."

"Then how is it that this peasant doesn't know what we mean, when we ask him where to find the gentleman whom we are looking for? All these people are in league against us, sir, and I address myself to you, as you are doubtless the gendarme of this village."

"Gibou," called out Jacques, "go in to Jean Charras's place; he has just opened his door. Take a glass of wine. I'll stand treat, and attend to your cattle here."

The post-boy did not need to be told twice, but turned on his heel, saying: "That's good! There's the Englishwoman taking old Arvert for a gendarme, and he hates them!"

The trooper no longer doubted but what the travellers were looking for the Count de Brouage, and he thought it best to get Francois Gibou out of the way before talking to them. That good-for-nothing fellow would not have hesitated to tell every one at Muron and elsewhere that Jacques Arvert had a mysterious lodger. However, although Jacques took this wise precaution on account of his patient, he was, nevertheless, ill disposed towards the persons who had come so far to see the count. In the first place, he was

offended at being taken for a gendarme, and in the second, he hated the English who were torturing the Emperor at Saint-Helena. "What is the name of the gentleman, as there is a gentleman in the case, it appears?" he asked, abruptly.

"It is Count René de Brouage," replied the Englishwoman, pompously.

"Who told you that he was here?"

"He came here, he wrote to us from this hamlet, and must be here still, for he has been wounded seriously."

Jacques had a great mind to tell the lady that he did not know what she was talking about. He imagined that the noisy foreigner was the count's sweetheart, and he could not understand how a Frenchman could possibly love a woman who undoubtedly had had brothers, or relatives, at all events, among the victors at Waterloo. Still he did not dare to dismiss her without consulting René, and he waited till she should more clearly explain herself.

"You don't reply," resumed the Englishwoman. "Has the count started for Paris then? Do tell us and you shall not regret it, for you will be rewarded by persons in high position."

"Their high position is nothing to me!" exclaimed the old trooper. "I'm not a gendarme, do you hear? I am an old soldier of Napoleon. I was at Mont Saint-Jean, and I got a sword-wound from your red-coats that very day. So you can let me alone about your gentleman! You did not give him to me to take care of for you, did you?"

Jacques would have gone on with similar polite remarks, for the airs and the questions of the daughter of Albion exasperated him; but he now saw another traveller lean forward at the door, a second woman, who, during this conversation, had remained seated far back in the coach, and who now said to him in a sweet voice: "You served under Napoleon?—then, perhaps, you knew my father, General de Brouage."

The old growler's anger at once disappeared, and he replied: "I should say that I did know him! He commanded the 9th Dragoons. Excuse me, mademoiselle, if I had known that it was you—but, you understand, I am not used to being questioned like a common soldier."

"Miss Elizabeth Tufton, my friend here, had no intention of offending you, sir. She is a foreigner, and excitement and anxiety—"

"You came then to get some news of the Count de Brouage, your relative?"

"My first cousin. His father and mine were brothers. You may imagine my distress when a letter from him told me that he was about to fight a duel, and that he expected to be wounded or killed. I set off at once, without even knowing whether he had survived, and I am still trembling lest I should hear the worst. You answer nothing! Ah! then my presentiments were all too true. He is dead!"

The young girl burst into sobs. Betsy uttered various exclamations in English, and took hold of her pupil's hands, attempting to console her. But Antoinette pushed her aside, and said, with an effort: "Speak, sir, I beg of you! tell me all, I have courage to hear it."

"Well, never mind what happens," replied Jacques Arvert, "I can't stand seeing General de Brouage's daughter cry. Your cousin has been seriously wounded, mademoiselle, but he will live through it."

"He is alive! Where is he?"

To these words, which burst impetuously from Antoinette de Brouage's heart, Jacques replied with a gesture which meant: "Not so loud!"

"Mademoiselle," said he, "prudence is the order of the day, just now. Your cousin is in my house. He fought in my garden, and I can say, without boasting, that I have taken as good care of him as though he had been my son. But no one here knows of the affair, or that I have a wounded man in my place, and no one must know it, for if it were noised abroad, I should have a deal of trouble. I am not in favour with the authorities, and there are other reasons which I cannot tell you now. In a word, you would do well to return to Paris, or else go on to Rochefort. Your cousin will be up in a couple of weeks, and can then go to see you."

"Go away without seeing him!"

"No, after seeing him; I will settle the matter so that the post-boy sha'n't know anything about it. In an hour, in two hours' time, if you like, you will be able to drive on, and you will have had time to say a good deal to him."

"But how can I leave him when he is still in danger? I shall never be able to do it."

"In danger? Not at all! My friend, Saujon, says that he will get well, and he is his doctor. Believe me, mademoiselle, it will be best to do as I advise you."

"I think, my dear Antoinette, that it would indeed be better so," urged Miss Tufton, who occasionally showed a little good sense.

Antoinette still hesitated.

"Mademoiselle," resumed Jacques Arvert, so as to induce her to make up her mind, "a general's daughter can take an old soldier's word. Well, I swear to you that if you remain here it would result in the imprisonment of two worthy people, of whom I am one."

"Heaven forbid that I should thus reward you for having saved him!"

"Besides, where would you lodge? The only houses here are some peasants' huts, and my place is scarcely large enough for the wounded man and me."

"Oh! it would be perfectly shocking for us to remain under the same roof as the Count de Brouage!" exclaimed Miss Betsy. She had urged her pupil to set out on this dangerous trip, but it seemed to her highly improper to pass the night in Jacques Arvert's house. Englishwomen of her stamp are never consistent.

"Besides," concluded Jacques, "I shall speak to your cousin, and I am sure that he will say as I do."

"Take me to him!" said the young girl, eagerly.

"In five minutes, mademoiselle. Give me time to arrange matters with that scamp of a post-boy. I will call him and talk to him before you. If you don't contradict me all will go well." And thereupon Jacques called out:

"Come here, Gibou, you're wanted!"

"Here I am," replied the big-booted fellow from inside the hut, which did duty as an inn. And he came up, swaggering; his whip in one hand, and a glass, which had already been filled for him more than once, in the other.

"What do you mean," said the old soldier, "by not understanding that these ladies were looking for the gentleman who came so near killing himself in the Pécheres quarry, three gunshots from here? You must know very well that the roan horse belonging to the postmaster at Surgères was found at the bottom of the pit."

"Yes—I heard of that."

"And that the gentleman dragged himself as well as he could to Rochefort?"

"True! He sent my master the value of the colt—it was a man from Rochefort who brought the money to Surgères."

"Well, then, why didn't you tell your passengers so?"

"I? How could I know that they were looking for the mail-coach passenger? If they had told me—"

"They thought that he was still here. But I have told them all about it. They see their mistake, and they want to go on to Rochefort. Don't you, ladies?" added Jacques, putting his head in at the coach door.

The Englishwoman alone had the strength to reply: "Certainly, sir. We wish to go on."

"I must see him," murmured Mademoiselle de Brouage.

"You shall," said the old trooper, in a low tone. "But let me finish settling matters with this scamp here." Then, returning to François Gibou, he said: "So you can make ready to get on your old mare's back again."

"No, indeed!" replied the post-boy, in a surly tone. "They engaged me to bring them to the Ile d'Albe. Here they are. I am not going any further."

"What's all this? You refuse to go on, you scoundrel! The whole way has been paid for, and you think that you are going to get off with merely half of the distance? None of that, my lad! I'd rather take the reins myself."

"But Monsieur Arvert, I brought the Parisian ladies here at a break-neck pace, and my horses are blown."

"They can rest for an hour, then. These ladies are going to do me the favour to come into my house for a rest, and while they warm themselves you can drink at neighbour Charras's, as long as you are thirsty. I'll pay for it all."

"That's another thing," replied the cheeky postillion. "However, the master won't be pleased. He thought that I should be back at Muron in an hour's time, and now I shall not get there till to-morrow morning; he may discharge me."

"We will give you a sovereign, a louis, I mean," whispered Miss Betsy.

The old soldier immediately translated this into: "You shall have a napoleon if you do as these ladies wish."

"Oh, very well! Long live the Emperor!" shouted François Gibou. "They can stay at your house as long as they like. I sha'n't disturb them. I'll go and talk to Charras's white wine."

The tippler turned towards the inn, and Jacques opened the door of the vehicle. The Englishwoman was the first to set her flat feet upon the muddy road, and the old trooper did not help her to alight. He would not have touched the hand of a countrywoman of Sir Hudson Lowe, the Emperor's jailer, on any account. But on the other hand he made haste to offer his hand to the daughter of General de Brouage. As Antoinette alighted from the carriage, she asked in a trembling voice: "Where is he?"

"Here, mademoiselle," replied the trooper pointing to his house. "He isn't as well lodged as if he lived with his uncle, but he has never once complained. He is a worthy young man."

"Take me to him, I beg of you, sir!" entreated Antoinette.

Jacques Arvert made no further difficulty, for it was raining in torrents, and there was no possibility of remaining any longer at the door. He

helped the young girl to cross the road, and led her into the room on the ground floor, Miss Elizabeth Tufton following with hugh strides.

When both women were under the shelter of his hospitable roof, the old soldier of the Empire began by shutting the street door, and then opened the one which communicated with the staircase. On the hearth a good fire was burning and before it stood the sick man's broth. An iron lamp upon the mantelpiece lighted up the travellers.

Jacques now approached them, and said with a smile : " My patient will be very glad ; but it is better for you to let me tell him first of all that you are here, for if he saw you come in suddenly like that, it would have a bad effect upon him, for he is only convalescent and as nervous as a woman. Just now he had a kind of vision, do you know ? and was talking about you."

" About me ?" repeated Mademoiselle de Brouage, blushing with pleasure.

" Yes, you need not be surprised at that, and it does not surprise me, for you are as pretty as you can be. You look like your father who was the handsomest officer in the French army. It seems to me as though I can see him now, just as he looked at the review after the battle of Friedland. When the young man upstairs was going to fight with that other fellow, he was thinking about you all the time. If you had seen him when he was writing to you, there at the table, penning the letter which my friend Saujon posted, ah ! you would have been sure that he loved you dearly. His eyes shone, and his heart was beating at a great rate, I'm sure of it ! "

Antoinette lowered her eyes, and did not reply, but Miss Tufton had no such cause for emotion, and so she asked at once : " Who was the count's antagonist ? "

" A fellow who does not know what fear is, but I'm not aware of his name," replied the old soldier.

He did not like to meddle with other people's affairs, and was particularly careful not to tell the general's daughter that the man who had wounded René was still at Rochefort.

" He is there," said Antoinette, looking towards the door near the staircase.

" Don't be alarmed, mademoiselle, he cannot hear you," said the ex-quartermaster, " but he heard the vehicle stop—the window was open upstairs—he heard what the post-boy called out to me from below, and what I said to him, so that made him suspect something. That is as it should be, it prepared him for some news—but I must go up, he must be very impatient indeed."

" Yes, he must be suffering, and I am very anxious, too," said Mademoiselle de Brouage.

Jacques at once turned to go upstairs, but Miss Betsy thought herself called upon to indulge in a few remarks full of wisdom and sentiment. " Stop, sir ! " said she, assuming a stiff attitude. " It is necessary for you to know who I am before you tell the Count de Brouage that we are here."

" You are an Englishwoman, anybody can see that," said Napoleon's old soldier, bluntly.

" I congratulate myself upon that, sir."

" I don't see why," growled Jacques.

Miss Tufton either did not or would not understand the meaning of this rude answer, for she resumed, drawing up her tall, soldier-like figure : " It

was I who advised Mademoiselle de Brouage to come here to see her betrothed, but I cannot allow her to see him unless I am present at the interview."

"You cannot allow her! Are you her aunt?"

"No, sir, I am not her aunt, I am not old enough for that. Let me inform you that I am the governess and friend of Mademoiselle de Brouage. That suffices, I presume, to give me the right to watch over her? Speak, my dear Antoinette," added Betsy, to her pupil. "Tell this gentleman that it would be highly improper for you to remain alone with the count."

Antoinette blushed, but remained silent, and the expression of her face clearly showed that she did not entertain the same opinions as her companion, and even thought her scruples somewhat tardy.

"Ah! is that the way of it?" exclaimed Jacques Arvert. "Come, mademoiselle! I will take you to the room where your cousin is. There is no harm in that, as you are going to marry him, and you must have heaps of things to say to him that the English needn't know. Besides a conversation, even alone, with an invalid is not compromising by any means. So you need not mind leaving your governess in the rear-guard. She'll get over it! I'll entertain her."

"In the rear-guard!" indignantly repeated the relative of the "Baron Tuftons of Coxbridge Lodge." "Will you allow a man to talk to me in that kind of army slang, Antoinette?"

Mademoiselle de Brouage scarcely knew how to reconcile her impatience with the propriety of having the Englishwoman beside her. She did not wish to offend her friend's ideas on the subject, or to wound her susceptibility, but on the other hand, it seemed to her quite natural that she should see her cousin without a witness, for she did not understand that her pure simple affection needed watching. After reading Count de Brouage's letter, Betsy had exclaimed, "My dear, you are engaged to your cousin, you must go to him," and Antoinette had followed her advice, hoping that her father would forgive her for having done so without consulting him. Betsy had declared that this was the English custom in such cases, and that there was no instance of any nobleman having refused to forgive a daughter for a similar peccadillo. She added, moreover, that the famous blacksmith of Gretna Green had married hundreds of couples, every year, without the slightest authorization from the bride's or the bridegroom's parents. During the journey, when Mademoiselle de Brouage had spoken of her father's anger, and shown anxiety as to the result of her imprudent step, Betsy had upheld her in her resolve. And yet now that René had again been found, Betsy suddenly remembered that a well-bred young lady ought never to depart from the conventional rules of society. It was rather late in the day, and her flighty head had a fine way indeed of making up for a serious error. In point of fact the giddy creature's project was to force the general to consent to Antoinette's marriage with René, and to be able to say on her return, that everything had gone on properly as regarded the two young people.

Antoinette had not listened to anything but the impulses of her heart, which had bidden her sacrifice everything to see René, and she thought that there was less harm in leaving Betsy in the lower room than in having left her father's house. Jacques Arvert, who saw her perplexity, came to her aid. He quietly took her hand and led her away, saying to the Englishwoman: "Every man's house is his castle. Did you ever hear

that proverb? If you did not know it before, you know it now. You can think it over while I take the young lady upstairs."

Miss Tufton was so overcome with indignation on hearing these remarks, that she sank upon a chair without attempting to detain her pupil, who followed the old soldier. The staircase conducted to a narrow landing, with which the doors of the two first floor rooms communicated.

"Stay here," said the old soldier. "I will prepare him. It will not take long." And he went quietly into the room where René, pale and feverish, was awaiting his return with anxious impatience.

"Well!" asked the wounded man, "what is it?"

"There is a person here who has come from Paris expressly to see you," replied Jacques with a smile.

"From Paris!"

"Yes, you guess who it is, don't you? Your letter took effect."

"My letter! can it be—"

"Mademoiselle de Brouage, your cousin."

"Where is she?" exclaimed René.

"Not far off. But you know that our friend Saujon has forbidden any excitement. Will you promise me to be calm?"

"Calm! oh yes, I will be calm."

"You don't look so. You are very much excited already, and if you speak so loud you will begin spitting blood again."

"Never mind, if I can only see her once more before I die."

"Oho! is that the way you talk? Well, then, so much the worse if you die of joy. Come, mademoiselle!" called out the old soldier, pushing open the door, which he had left ajar.

René uttered a cry and tried to rise, but lacked the strength to do so. Antoinette, pale and trembling, advanced towards him, upheld by Jacques, whose bold, frank face gleamed with pleasure. The veteran seated the young girl upon a chair close to the wounded man, and taking her hand he placed it in René's.

"I will leave you now," said he. "I must go and quiet the English-woman, who is pawing the ground downstairs, I can hear her from here. Don't talk too long, for I couldn't hold her in, and above all, don't forget the doctor's orders. No excitement, those are the directions."

And he rushed downstairs, after signing to René to calm himself. Worthy Jacques had found it all very easy to give advice, but René was so confused that he could not find a word to say, although his eyes fully expressed his feelings. Antoinette lowered her own, and remained mute and trembling, not daring either to look at her cousin or to withdraw her hand from his. For the first time since her innocence had led her into this adventure, she understood the serious character of the situation, and felt afraid. It was not regret for having infringed social usages that she felt, but sorrow at having grieved her father, and fear lest she had mistaken René's feelings. When she had received her cousin's letter, she had not calculated the consequence of flight, or thought of asking herself whether the count loved her as she loved him. Now that she was near him, the image of General de Brouage rose up before her, and she shuddered as she thought that her own heart had, perhaps, deceived her. She fancied that she could hear the stern old soldier whose child she was, cursing the guilty daughter who had disgraced his name. It seemed to her that René was about to reproach her for having compromised herself, and to tell her that what he felt for her was simply friendship and nothing

more. The scene she had witnessed at her father's house, returned to her mind, and she said to herself: "My father swore that day that René loved another, and it was, perhaps, true. What if the letter which he wrote to me when he was about to risk his life did not express his real sentiments? Oh! I should die of grief and shame."

The wounded man was suffering another kind of torture, and addressing other reproaches to himself. He realised the full extent of Antoinette's sacrifice; he was terrified at the responsibility laid upon him, and deplored the transport which had led him to send a simple-minded girl such an impassioned farewell which must have seemed to her an appeal. If the Marquis de Brouage could at this moment have seen the two lovers, frozen as they were by repentance, he would have thought them sufficiently punished, and have forgiven them at once.

René was the first to take courage. He gently pressed Antoinette's hand, still lying in his own, and said in a voice full of feeling: "You are restoring to me a happiness which I feared I had forever lost, and in order to do so you have risked your own. I bless you for having come, and I curse myself for having written to you."

"Then you regret having thought of me?" murmured Mademoiselle de Brouage.

"No, Heaven is my witness! I thought that I was about to die, and in that supreme hour I thought of you. But I bitterly regret that you should have decided to leave your father's house."

Antoinette turned pale, but did not reply.

"Does he know that I wrote to you?" asked René after a pause.

"No," stammered the young girl: "he was away from home when I received your letter. If he had been there I should have entreated him to take me to you, and he could not have resisted my prayers and tears. But every moment that passed took away a chance of seeing you alive. I was wild with terror. Betsy advised me to start at once. I did not reflect; it seemed to me that you were calling me, and so I started."

"Without telling anyone where you were going?"

"I wrote to my father to beg his pardon and to swear to him that I should soon be kneeling at his feet, but I did not speak of you."

"He will guess the cause of your departure, he must have guessed it already."

"I never thought of hiding it. I shall keep my promise and return to him, and tell him all. My grief will touch him, he will not drive me to despair by a refusal of his forgiveness."

"Do you believe that he will consent to our marriage?" asked René.

"I am sure that he will," replied Mademoiselle de Brouage, wiping away the tears from her lovely eyes. "You know what he is: he is quick and even violent, but he is kind, and he recovers himself before his anger carries him too far. If, after the fatal scene which caused our unhappiness, you had tried to move him, he would have yielded, I don't doubt it; but you did not return to the house. I then imagined that you had ceased to love me, that you loved some woman unworthy of you. My father said so, and it was then that Betsy wrote to you, and a few days afterwards I saw how it was that you had not returned, for I received your letter. I understood that you had been obliged to start for your estate at Brouage, and that you were going there when this duel—Ah! you don't know, you cannot know, all I have suffered during this terrible journey! It seemed to me that it would never end. I trembled when I arrived here lest I should

see you no more. But I could not believe that you were dead. If I had believed it, I should not have left home, for it would have killed me. My heart seemed to tell me that you were alive. I could see you lying pale and feverish upon your bed. I heard your voice calling me. This very room where you now are appeared to me in a dream."

"I also saw you often in dreams. Your image came to console me in the midst of my sufferings, but I did not hope that the dream would prove true."

"You did not hope it!" exclaimed the young girl. "You had given me up then? You would have deserted me? You would not have come to my father to ask him to forgive us and unite us?"

"Alas! I never hoped to make him yield, and now I hope it less than ever."

"I have more courage than you have, then, and greater faith, for what you dare not do I will do, and I feel sure of success. You forget that my father has loved you like a son, and that you bear the same name as himself. You don't know that he has never mentioned your name since the day when you wounded him by a declaration for which he was not prepared. His silence proves that he expected a fresh movement on your part. It shows that he regrets having falsely accused you of having been in love with another woman."

René started. The moment had come for confessing to Mademoiselle de Brouage that the general had spoken the truth. "Pardon me," murmured he—"pardon me for having concealed the past from you, a past which I blush for. I thought that I was about to perish. It would have cost me too much to confess, in bidding you farewell, that your father had not slandered me. But if I now remained silent I should despise myself. I had an unworthy passion for an odious creature. I carried it in my blindness so far as to ask Monsieur de Brouage, the head of my family, to consent to my marriage with this woman, and I did not realise that near me there was an adorable young girl whose heart was beating for me."

"Ah! then I was not wrong when I thought that I was deceived as to the feeling which led you to write to me?"

"When I wrote to you I was already cured," replied René, "for I had just learned from my adversary's lips that the miserable woman who had bewitched me had sent him after me expressly to pick a quarrel with me and kill me. And now that you know all, let me tell you that I hate her as much as I adore you; let me tell you that every drop of blood in my veins is yours, and that my life shall be devoted to repairing the harm I have done you, that I am ready to obey you in all things, and that I also entreat your pardon."

"My pardon!" said Antoinette, bursting into tears. "Ah! you very well know that I have never ceased to love you. It is I who ought to ask forgiveness."

"From your father," interrupted René; "and I should be unworthy of your love if I did not entreat you to return to him."

"And leave you?"

"It must be so. The general has no doubt been able to conceal the fact of your absence. To prolong it would be ruinous to your reputation. Besides, your father would never consent to our marriage if he thought that I had been the cause of your flight, and above all, had detained you here. There is still time to prevent exposure. Go back, I entreat you! Tell him everything; tell him that you yielded to foolish advice, and that I

begged you as a favour to return to Paris. And if he has not irrevocably turned his affection from me, if he is still interested in his unfortunate nephew, do not conceal anything from him. Tell him that I was attacked by a cut-throat sent by that woman, that I confess that I deserved this humiliation and the pain of being wounded by such a man as he. Tell him, in a word, that I shall not again forget that I bear his name, and that it shall never be dishonoured, no matter what may happen."

"Must I go, leaving you still in danger and with your wound scarcely healed?"

"The doctor says that I am out of danger. I shall soon recover my strength and shall start for Paris, and then——"

But at this moment the door was suddenly opened, and Jacques Arvert came in, saying: "Upon my word, I cannot stand it any longer! I had rather lead a squad of recruits than manage that Englishwoman. For half an hour I have been trying to quiet her, but she rears and plunges like a two-year-old colt. So I give it up, and have come to warn you that she insists upon coming up stairs. She maintains that your interview is shocking and—goodness! here she is now!"

Indeed, Miss Tufton appeared at the door, stiff, majestic, and frigid. "Antoinette, my dear," she said, in a sharp tone of voice, "I think that your interview with your cousin has lasted long enough." Then turning towards René, she made him a formal bow and said in a ceremonious tone:

"Monsieur le Comte, I am your obedient servant. You will probably agree with me that Mademoiselle de Brouage has been here long enough."

"It wasn't worth while to come at all, then," growled the old trooper.

"I was just now advising Mademoiselle de Brouage to return to Paris to night," replied René, stiffly.

"Oh!" exclaimed the sentimental Betsy, "I don't mean to make her leave the province before you have entirely recovered. It will suffice if we stay at Rochefort, the neighbouring town. When you are able to travel, count, we will return to Paris together; and when I have proved to Monsieur de Brouage that my dear Antoinette is engaged to you, he will not make any difficulty about granting you her hand."

René looked with astonishment at the Englishwoman as she made these astounding remarks, as if after already compromising her pupil, she was bent upon compromising her still more. The count was about to speak his mind very plainly when a man's voice was heard in the room below, a voice calling Jacques Arvert. The old soldier started at this call and muttered: "I could swear it was the voice of that youngster who gave my patient his sword-thrust."

It happened that René did not hear the quartermaster's remark—Antoinette and Miss Betsy heard it, but they failed to understand.

Jacques Arvert realised that the best course was to find out at once what was the purpose of the visitor who had so unceremoniously made his way into the house. So he hurried downstairs, leaving his patient to explain matters to the terrible Englishwoman. When he entered the lower room he saw that he had not been mistaken. It was indeed Marcas who had called him. The student had recovered, and did not even wear his arm in a sling. "If I expected anybody in the world it wasn't you!" exclaimed the old soldier. "My friend Saujon told me that you would not be able to stir for a week."

"The doctor was wrong, you see," replied Marcas.

"Never mind ; it wasn't he who gave you leave to come out, for he was here not an hour ago, and you must have left Rochefort before nightfall. You must have met him, now I think of it."

"Perhaps I did. I don't know, for it was quite dark."

"Yes, and you did not wish to talk to him. You were trying to avoid him."

"What of it, if it were so?"

"Well, I should say that it was not quite the thing to steal away like a robber without even taking the trouble to thank the worthy man who had nursed and cured you."

"I left a letter for him. That was all I could do. This evening a Knight of Liberty brought me, from the high committee, the order to return to Paris without losing a moment."

"Indeed ! Well, you don't seem to be in any great hurry, I must say. You stop at the very first stage."

"The coach had left when the order came. However, I had kept the mare which I hired from the postmaster at Surgères. So I got upon her and she is taking me to Surgères, where I hope to find a place in the diligence from La Rochelle to-morrow morning."

"You came here on horseback, then?"

"Yes, and I am not tired in the least. You see that the doctor was wrong in trying to detain me, and that I was right in starting without waiting for him."

"That is your own lookout. But why did you stop here?"

"To thank you, in the first place."

"There was no occasion for that."

"And to ask you for my swords, which I left here after the duel."

"Humph ! they did a pretty piece of work, those swords of yours ! Are you going to use them again on the road?"

"No, but they suit my hand, and I value them."

"What if I told you that I have not got them?" growled Jacques Arvert, who did not like this perambulating duellist at all.

"You must have them. They were left on the ground at the end of your garden. After the affair you so urged me to go off that in my hurry I forgot to take them."

"Very well ! I will bring them you. Is that all that you have to say?"

"I should like to ask—"

"What?"

"How my antagonist finds himself?"

"Indeed? do you feel so much interest in him as all that? Are you anxious to dispatch him by chance?"

"I ! I am delighted that he escaped," exclaimed Marcas. He spoke the truth. The Count de Brouage served his plans better by surviving.

"Really now?" asked Jacques, ironically.

"Yes, especially after seeing what I have just seen."

"What may that be?"

"A post-chaise at the wayside."

"A post-chaise," repeated the old soldier, who would have been glad to pretend that he did not understand Marcas.

"Oh, don't look so surprised ! I know everything. I have just been talking with the post-boy."

"Ah ! and what did he say?"

"That he had brought two ladies, an old one and a young one, who were looking for a wounded man, and who had come in here."

"Well, what of it?"

"Nothing. I know them, and I had no difficulty in guessing that they had come from Paris to see the Count de Brouage. The letter posted by Dr. Saujon must have reached its destination."

"That may be, but it doesn't concern you."

"Of course not."

"You don't presume, I suppose, to oppose the ladies' visit to my house?"

"Not at all. I hope with all my heart that they will remain there."

"Well, then, I am happy to be able to assure you that they have no such intention."

"Ah! they are going back, then? Will they take Monsieur de Brouage with them?"

"Do you know that you are asking too many questions?"

"I shall ask no more. Give me my weapons and let me go."

"I might put you out without replying, but it suits me to inform you that the man you wounded is not in a state to travel yet, you put him in such a pretty state, and that the ladies are going to Rochefort."

"In the post-chaise?"

"Of course, unless they walk."

"Nine miles would be a trifle too far," sneered the student.

"And now here are your spits," said Jacques, taking the swords from a cupboard. "Be off with you, and I hope I shall never set eyes on you again!"

Marcas took the weapons, which he knew so well how to handle, and went towards the door, saying: "My compliments to Mademoiselle de Brouage and her friend."

Before he had crossed the threshold, the old trooper caught up with him, seized hold of his arm, and energetically exclaimed:

"You young rascal! I see that you are plotting something against my patient or these ladies. Well, just open your eyes. If I hear that you have done the least harm to them, you will have to deal with me. And I shall know how to manage matters! I would go to Paris after you, on purpose, if need be."

"That would be useless," replied Marcas, who was quite undisturbed.

"You shall soon hear from me. I will tell the committee that you take the part of the nobility against the brethren of the order, and they will not fail to acquaint you with their satisfaction."

"I don't care three straws for the committee, or for you either!" exclaimed Jacques. And so saying, he pushed Marcas out of the house. This done, and the door bolted inside to prevent a second intrusion on the part of the young scamp whom he so heartily detested, the grenadier hastily returned to the room above where he found René and his cousin exchanging tender glances, and Miss Betsy discoursing eloquently in order to induce them to look upon matters as she did.

"You will never guess whom I have seen," said Jacques to the wounded man. "That conscript who put you into this plight the other day at the end of my garden. He had the impudence to come to me to ask for his larding pins which he left here after the duel. He is up and about again, and going back to the capital. That animal of a Saujon ought not to have cured him so quick; however, that's his way of doing things."

"He is going back to Paris, is he?" exclaimed René, who immediately

thought that Mademoiselle de Brouage might encounter Octavie's dangerous lover.

Jacques understood his fears and replied : " He is going to Surgères on his grey mare, and he will take the coach from there."

" He is the man who tried to kill you, is he not?" asked the young girl, with alarm.

" You see clearly," said Miss Tufton, " that we must go on to Rochefort. I cannot endure even the thought of meeting that man face to face. We cannot take the same road as he does."

" No! no! I do not wish to see him," said Antoinette.

" If you wish to go to Rochefort," said the old soldier, " my friend Saujon will undertake to find you a suitable lodging to-morrow. You can go to the Grand Basha hotel to-night. It is the best there. Have you your passports?"

" I have mine," replied the Englishwoman, " and Mademoiselle de Brouage is too young to need one."

" Besides, she can pass for your niece."

" Again!" exclaimed Betsy, indignantly.

" Or your cousin, if you prefer it. The carriage in which you came is yours, is it not?"

" The coach? yes. One of my countrymen let me have it for a hundred guineas the night we left."

" I don't know how much a hundred guineas may be, but if it is more than five hundred francs, your countryman made a fool of you, for it is frightfully worm eaten! But never mind, it will do very well for Rochefort. Besides, you are an Englishwoman, and the government likes the English. Nobody will torment you."

Betsy nodded approvingly, and was about to reply when the noise of wheels and the snapping of a whip were heard.

" What's that?" muttered Jacques Arvert. " It sounds as though another vehicle had come up."

" Perhaps my father has followed us!" murmured Mademoiselle de Brouage.

She had turned pale, and the governess did not seem at her ease, for she knew that the general was not in any wise partial to her theories as to the freedom befitting young people.

" I will see what it is!" cried Jacques, darting down the stairs.

" No," said the Englishwoman, who had not yet lost her head. " The general cannot know where we are. You alone, my dear Antoinette, saw your cousin's letter."

" If it be my father, we will fall at his feet," said the young girl, " and when he sees the son of his own brother almost dying, he will understand why I came here, and take pity on us."

" I will tell him that it is all my fault," articulated René, with difficulty.

" No!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Brouage, " I do not want you to blame yourself. It is I, I alone, who am in fault. It was I who wished to come, and my father shall also know that just now, when I wished to remain with you at the risk of committing an irreparable fault, you begged of me to return to Paris in order to prevent a scandal."

If the Count de Brouage had still any doubt as to his cousin's love, these words would have sufficed to convince him of the feeling which he had unknowingly inspired. When love comes without being sought, it is always sincere. The generous girl thought of taking all the anger of the Marquis

de Brouage upon herself, and of freeing René from all blame as to her serious imprudence. René was about to claim his share of responsibility, however, but just then Jacques Arvert burst in like a bombshell, exclaiming: "The scamp has stolen your coach!" And as no one appeared to understand what he meant, he resumed, with a torrent of oaths: "Yes, he has bribed that scamp of a post-boy, who was so drunk that he could hardly get into the saddle. They took off your trunks and pitched them out upon the road. That rascally Parisian got into the vehicle, Gibou mounted the near horse, and off they have gone to Muron. My neighbour Charras, who told me about it, hadn't time to call me before they were off. Ah! the rascals! I hope they will be upset and killed as they go down the very next hill! If they had left the grey mare, I should have got upon her and gone after them, but they tackled her on, too."

"Then it is impossible for us to leave this house!" exclaimed the Englishwoman, in consternation. "We must sleep here!—it is shocking!—very shocking, indeed!"

"What a fuss about nothing! My house is respectable, let me tell you! And if it does not suit you, you can camp out on the road. I am sure that General de Brouage's daughter is not so prudish as all that, and won't think it any harm to sleep in the room down-stairs. To-morrow morning, at daylight, I will walk to Rochefort, hire a vehicle and come here for you, and by noon you will be at the Grand Basha hotel, and no one will say anything."

Betsy looked at Antoinette, who looked at her cousin. This annoying occurrence upset all the plans which they had formed. The travellers could neither return to Paris, as René had urged them to do, nor proceed at once to Rochefort, as Miss Tufton wished.

The wounded man guessed that the hateful Mareas had played them this malicious trick with the design of forcing Mademoiselle de Brouage into a position which must inevitably compromise her. The imminence of the danger suggested an idea to him. "Our friend Jacques is right," said he, eagerly. "It is necessary to reach Rochefort as soon as possible; but you must not remain there. My farm at Brouage is at a few leagues from the town. You must go there to-morrow. I will give you a letter for my farmers, who will receive you, and you must write to my uncle when you get there. You must tell him everything."

"He will forgive us, I am sure!" exclaimed the young girl.

"This arrangement seems to me a very proper one," said Betsy.

"I did not think of it," rejoined Jacques, "but it is the only thing to do, I'm sure. I will bring in your trunks and arrange your bivouac for you. To-morrow evening, mademoiselle, you will be at the farm, and your cousin will join you there when he has the general's consent to marry you; and your father will grant it, I promise you. You will be married at Brouage, and Saujon and I invite ourselves to the wedding."

XVIII.

LOQUETIÈRES was certainly one of Fouché's best pupils; but he had one fault, with which his illustrious master had often reproached him. The cunning man was weak as regarded the fair sex. No one is perfect, and Loquetières, in the days of his youth, when he had been handsome, had taken advantage of his good looks, and made many conquests; however, as

women always know how to retaliate, those whom he entrapped urged him on to acts of folly, and he barely resisted them.

Had Loquetières been less foolish, he would have accumulated a deal of money, for under the Empire he had many well-paid matters in hand ; but his money went as soon as acquired, and he now deplored his recklessness. The "demoiselles" of those times were very extravagant with their lovers' cash, just like those of now-a-days, and Fouclé's lucky agent allowed himself to be despoiled by them without complaining over much. Wisdom had come with years, however, and Loquetières, once gallant and prodigal, was now trying to make money. He no longer went to balls and theatres ; he never set foot at Frascati's, unless called there by business, and he was not known to keep a mistress.

In a word, since the Restoration, he had settled down ; and the daughter of his friend the chevalier had a deal to do with this change. Loquetières had been dazzled by the wonderful beauty of Octavie, when in 1819 he met in Paris his friend, Saint-Héliér, whom he had formerly known in Germany, where they both had been playing the spy, one for the Imperial Government, and the other for the Count de Provence. Loquetières was a good judge of beauty, and he said to himself at once that he would willingly renounce a bachelor life if this adorable creature would consent to be his wife. The chevalier, when questioned by him, had shown no repugnance. The son-in-law thus offered him was somewhat old for a girl of seventeen, but although turned fifty, Loquetières had coined money since 1815 by discovering three or four conspiracies, and as he had grown saving, he had now a fair amount of cash. However, M. de Saint-Héliér, who was an excellent father, had declared that he should leave Octavie free in her choice, and that in order to marry her, Loquetières must first of all win her consent.

For two years he had been trying to please the exacting beauty, and had not yet succeeded. She did not dismiss him, however ; in fact, she treated him rather better during the winter of 1821, but he was becoming weary of living on hope alone, when the conversation he overheard at the Panorama-Dramatique changed all his plans.

The little scene of the mysterious letter handed to Octavie by the malicious Bernaville had greatly contributed to his change of purpose. It was certainly tempting to become the husband of the eighth wonder of the world, but it was yet more agreeable to become the possessor of ten millions. Besides, he might be both. Mademoiselle de Saint-Héliér would certainly not refuse Loquetières if he were immensely rich, and if, when he had attained to this unexpected wealth, he still persisted in courting a coquette who had so many admirers. He therefore made up his mind to begin by going after the treasure. After settling matters with his employers and General de Brouage, who had allowed him ten days more to find his son's murderer, the spy departed quietly, but not without confiding his plans to somebody.

The kings of tragedy always have a confidante, and Loquetières had one also. This repentant Don Juan had kept up an old attachment in a platonic form. Having, in 1805, been a favourite with a "Mervilleuse" who had come out under the Reign of Terror as a "Goddess of Liberty," he had continued to remain on good terms with this beauty, while she was courted under the Directory, and deserted under the Empire. Her real name was Sophie Cruchot, but at the end of the Consulate she had changed it into Athénais de la Tremblade, and since the return of the Bourbons, she asserted that she had emigrated, and now lived on the income of

her property which had been restored to her, thanks to his Majesty the King.

The truth was that she had been a spy in Fouché's employ both in France and abroad. Her friend had urged her to this course, and she had made money enough by it to ensure herself a livelihood. Loquetières greatly appreciated her sagacity, her philosophical turn of mind and her lively disposition. He went to see her every day, and often dined with her and consulted her upon important matters. He had never concealed from her his intentions as regarded Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, nor did he now hide his intentions of leaving Paris for a time, and the object of his journey.

He even promised to write to her, although he was well aware of the existence of the Dark Room. However, he had a way of corresponding with his old friend through a laundress, who was devoted to his interests, and whose name certainly did not figure in the list of suspected persons whose missives were laid every day upon Saint-Hélier's desk. Besides, the least he could do was to keep "the countess" acquainted with his movements, for she would be very useful to him during his journey, as she could watch over matters in Paris, and after his success place the booty in a safe place. She expected a share in the spoils, and indeed she had a right to one after twenty-five years' faithful assistance in his various projects.

Thus it happened that one fine June morning, Athénais de la Tremblade, while seated in her elegant drawing-room on the Quai Malaquais, received a letter dated from Rochefort, which ran as follows :

"My dear Sophie,—Before leaving, I promised to send you, as soon as I could, a report as to the progress of my operations, and I keep my word as promptly as though I were working for the authorities, and had to write to the Duke of Otranto, our former patron, who died at Trieste this winter, and who will never be replaced, as his equal will never be found. I do not regret the great man now, however, for, were he still at the head of the police service, I should not have the remotest chance of bringing back the millions. The treasure and the Carbonari to whom it belongs would have been found three months ago and placed in safe keeping. But now we have magisterial prefects, good souls who imagine that the police ought to be respectable. It is equivalent to cooking with white kid gloves on one's hands.

"I spoke of the Carbonari and I stick to it. You know that ever since a certain evening when I saw *Ogier the Dane* performed, I had been almost certain of this, and now I am entirely so. These millions belong to the Italian conspirators who have misled Count Fabien ; the Baroness de Casanova is taking care of the tons of gold, which are hidden in the ruins of a château not far from the dull town where I have just arrived.

"I will soon take them in hand, and pending the outset of my campaign, I must tell you what occurred on my journey. I am sure that it will interest you. You know that I took the coach for Rochefort last Wednesday night after bidding you good-bye. We were full, that is to say that there were three of us in the coupé, and I had the second place in the left corner. I had come somewhat late, and my travelling companions were already inside. The right corner was occupied by an old man wearing a long overcoat, the collar of which was drawn up over his ears ; he also had a cap pulled down over his face, and very large gold spectacles. Between him and me there was a man of fifty, or thereabouts, with long grey hair, and an honest respectable look. I glanced stealthily at them both. I thought that my neighbour must be a priest in citizen's clothes, but he told me that

he was a teacher of mathematics, and was going to Rochefort to give lessons to the pupils preparing for the Naval School. He also remarked that he was somewhat deaf, and indeed I soon saw that this was the case, which must be a great annoyance to a teacher.

"As for the man on the right, I mistrusted him at once. His nose especially fixed my attention. It was large and red, a kind of chorister's nose, which indicated nothing, though it seemed to me that it must bend and lengthen like a bit of india-rubber. I fancied that I had seen the same nose in an aquiline shape. But where? That was what I could not remember. Night was falling, so I said to myself that I would study the protuberance by daylight, and I went to sleep.

"I was very much fatigued with having had to run about to offices and so on during the day on which I left, and I did not wake until we stopped for breakfast. At table, in order to make my neighbours talk, I displayed all possible good-nature, and I can flatter myself that I succeeded with the ladies, although the gentlemen of the *coupé* did not seem cordial. However the professor could not sustain a conversation, as he was deaf; and the other man only opened his mouth to eat. The more I looked at him the more I imagined that there was something unnatural about his appearance. His chin was buried in a huge cravat, such as I used to wear when you were first smitten with me. His red wig hid three-quarters of his forehead, and his enormous gold spectacles were provided with blue glasses, and side pieces besides. I thought to myself that if I could only see his eyes, I should know what to think him, and the old ape bothered me so much that I made up my mind to have recourse to strong measures.

"The breakfast was nearly over. The driver called out, 'Get in, gentlemen!' Every one hastily rose up jostling each other, and in passing out of the dining-room, I found myself side by side with the solemn-looking old man. I had an eye-glass hanging from my neck as is my habit, so I took hold of the ribbon and made the glass spin round—this is a trick fashionable among fops you know—and in doing so I let my glass catch in the old man's spectacles. They flew up into the air, and fell at a short distance from him. He hastily bent down to pick them up, but before he had time to put them on again, my eyes had met his, which sufficed to enable me to recognise him.

"You will never guess, my dear Sophie, who it was. I will allow you a hundred, a thousand guesses, but you may as well know at once. This silent and respectable traveller was my old friend the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier. You are surprised. You naturally imagine that I am mistaken. Well, then, I am *sure*. The father of the fair and scornful Octavie—I know that you are not jealous—the Director of the Dark Room, had started at the same time as myself in the same *coupé*, and he arrived with me at Rochefort. What has he come here for? What serious motives have induced him to leave his office and his daughter? Why did he lie to me, four or five days before, by telling me that he was going to Burgundy to settle some private business, when he had really already taken his place for Saintonge?

"I need not explain to a woman of your intelligence what I at once conjectured. Saint-Hélier had heard, it was as clear as day, of the existence of this treasure, and had come to find it. How had he got upon the track? Very probably through some letter unsealed by him in the exercise of his official functions. One thing is certain, he is after the millions. The old scamp thinks that he will be able to appropriate them. It is certain

that if he did, his daughter would be out of my reach. But he is reckoning without his host, and when I am rich I shall let him beg of me to become his son-in-law. I shall not trouble my head any more about his Octavie, who might deceive me. We will go and live in London, my dear Sophie, and do great things. I have always had a taste for business on a large scale.

"However, I must return to the man who was once to have been my father-in-law, and I assure you that, although I recognized him at once, he did not know me either at the first or second glance. It is true that I had surpassed myself in my get up, in which I am always skilful. You know that my passport, which I prepared for myself, bears the name of Charles de la Braise, landowner, and member of the antiquarian society of Picardy. I chose the profession of archaeologist, in order to have a pretext for visiting the ruins of the castle where the treasure lies.

"It was necessary to dress myself and make myself look as though I were what I pretended to be, and I can assure you that I have succeeded fully. I seem to be three inches taller, and ten years younger. I wear whiskers as black as jet, as well as a small moustache. Moustaches are beginning to be fashionable among country gentlemen. I have changed my nose and my voice. I wear a nut-coloured overcoat, which is a masterpiece in its way, and I have procured a volume of Marclangy's *Gaule Poétique*, which I pretend to read with the utmost attention. My neighbour, the professor of mathematics, so fully believes in me that he asked me for historical information about the churches in all the towns and villages through which we passed. What I told him was purely imaginary, as you may well suppose. As for Saint-Hélier, he scarcely looked at me.

"I now come to two incidents that occurred during the last day's journey, and which I am sure will interest you. As I told you, my dear Sophie, that old ape of a Saint-Hélier did not see through my disguise. He had a sharper man than himself to deal with; and, besides, he is much less skilful than he used to be when he was in Germany for the Count de Provence. He has failed in making up his face and dress, and lacks his old cunning. Formerly, he would have known me at once; but he did not even look at me. He went to sleep and dozed all day, and as he is travelling under the name of Jean Vignon, merchant—this I saw on the driver's list—his gold spectacles and fine grey overcoat don't at all suit the social condition which he has ventured to assume. He looks more like an academician. However, his presence made me anxious. Starting with the idea that he must be going to Brouage—an idea that became a certainty in my mind—I said to myself: 'How will he set about laying his hands upon the treasure?' I have my plan, an excellent one, which I think it needless to dwell upon until it proves successful. Saint-Hélier must have his, and his is not, perhaps, a bad one, for he has a good head for planning. He is only faulty in execution. He has no nerve, no daring; but his ideas are often good. I considered, for these reasons, that I should do as well to be the first upon the ground, and I resolved to play him one of my tricks.

"This was yesterday evening. We had dined at Poitiers, and the coach had arrived at the foot of a hill which seemed to have no end. All the passengers alighted to go up the hill on foot, and the spectacled viper did the same. But not being nimble he lagged behind. I went ahead, for I still have my young legs. They are no older than my heart. Night was near at hand, and we could not see very clearly. At the top of the hill the

vehicle stopped, and the passengers began to get in. I told the professor of mathematics and the driver that our companion had gone on ahead, and that we should certainly catch him up. They believed me. We resumed our seats. We went on, and, of course, we did not come upon the worthy chevalier, who had so foolishly lagged behind.

"I rubbed my hands with delight, and said to myself that he would be poking about in the suburbs of Poitiers when I should be at Rochefort. And I was all the more pleased as at the next stage, that of Croutelle, the driver said that he should not amuse himself with waiting for the laggard, and that it was all his own fault if he was left behind. However, he overtook us nine miles further on, near Lusignan. He had succeeded in hiring a carryall from a peasant with one of those little Poitou horses which go like the wind. He scolded the driver, who let him scold, and who did not speak about me. So Saint-Hélier resumed his seat, and did not stir again till the next morning, when we breakfasted at Niort.

"As you see, my dear Sophie, I was defeated in this skirmish; but I shall win the final battle, for Saint-Hélier may be as cunning as he likes, I have means at my command which he has not and cannot have. I have sent four of my best men ahead, fellows who were with me in Fouché's time, but who have not been employed by Government since the return of the Bourbons. They only work for me. They are as good at a sudden emergency, as in obtaining information, and I can rely completely upon them.

"They arrived here two days ago. I have just seen them lounging about the hotel. We are to meet to-night at twilight on the ramparts, and I have no doubt but what they will have a great deal to tell me. The chevalier has no such auxiliaries as these. Where could he have found any? I don't suppose that he has brought the men whom he employs in the Dark Room. Those fellows are sedentary, and only know how to pry into people's letters. It would frighten them to undertake anything outside of that. So Saint-Hélier must be going to work by himself, and I doubt his success. Besides, I shall be ahead of him, and when he appears, the nest will be empty.

"To finish the account of my journey, I must tell you that on the last day I met a person whom I little expected to see. At Niort, our coach met the diligence from La Rochelle. The passengers from Paris and those who were going there breakfasted at the same table. Imagine my amazement when I saw in front of me a certain young scamp whom I have often mentioned to you, one Victorin Marcas, whom the chevalier was fool enough to employ as his secretary. This young rascal is courting Octavie, who does not, perhaps, scorn his advances, and the first thing that I shall do, if I marry her, will be to cut the acquaintance short. I have a still surer means of getting rid of him, however, for I am almost certain that he killed the son of General de Brouage, and I might have him arrested on my return to Paris, for he is going back there now, and will have arrived when you receive this letter.

"Where has he been? I neither know nor care. Still I wonder whether he had been prowling about the treasure of the Carbonari. He belongs to them, I suspect. Whatever the truth may be, he is certainly not bringing back any gold in the diligence. But no matter, I shall inquire and find out whether he has been seen at Rochefort, or thereabouts. It is needless to add that he did not know me. He ate as if he were starving, and did not look at anyone. He did not even know that his

worthy employer was at the same table. Saint-Hélier, it is true, is not well enough disguised to deceive me ; but he is altered sufficiently to put a young man of twenty-two off the scent. On the other hand, it seemed to me that Marcas looked very attentively at the professor of mathematics. He acted as though he recognized him, but had forgotten his name. He was evidently wrong, however, for the professor paid no attention to him. I nevertheless noted the fact. In such a case as this, everything is of importance.

"The rest of the journey was without incident, for I do not include, as of any account, a kind of vision which I had, just as the diligence was passing a hamlet a few miles from Rochefort. I thought that I saw, seated at the window of a peasant's house, Count René de Brouage, the elder of the general's nephews. He looked very pale, and as though he had gone through a severe illness. But I was no doubt mistaken, for if the count were in this part of the country, he would be at his farm at Brouage, and not at a cottage. Still I have determined to make inquiries. Just at present I am at the Grand Pacha Hotel. Saint-Hélier has gone to another hostelry, not because he suspects me—I'm sure as to that—but he perhaps intends to go through some new transformation, and does not want the travellers in the coach to recognize him. I will find him, however, and set a watch upon him. As for the teacher of mathematics, he lives in the town, so he says, and I shall not trouble myself about him.

"Now, my dear Sophie, all that remains to be said is that you must have faith and hope. Excepting these two trifling specks, the sky is clear. I am near the goal. Before a week has elapsed, the treasure will be mine, and I believe that it is a vast one. Give your old friend all your best wishes for success. I cannot promise to write again very soon. I cannot even say if I shall be able to write at all. It will depend upon a good many things ; but I repeat, all goes well. 'From the height of heaven, his last abode,' as Scribe says in *Michel and Christine*, the Duke of Otranto, my old master and yours, must feel pleased with me. You also will feel pleased, my dear Sophie, for I shall give you your share of the Carbonari's pile, and it will be a good one.

This letter was simply signed "Alphonse," the Christian name by which Loquetières was known in fast society, and the Comtesse de la Tremblade was so overjoyed by what she read, that she knocked her favourite cat off her knees where he was sleeping. However, as she turned the leaf, she saw that there was a postscript.

"Here is something new," wrote Loquetières. "Just as I was about to close my letter to take it to the post office, I was attracted to the window by the sound of a carriage driving up to the hotel. What was my astonishment on seeing, in a local conveyance, driven by a man who looked like an old trooper, the daughter of General de Brouage, accompanied by an Englishwoman. I can guess why she is here. She has come to join her cousin, so it was certainly he whom I saw at the hamlet, nine miles from Rochefort. How strange that the Prefect of Police should have told me but the other day to go and place myself under the orders of the general, who is looking everywhere for his daughter. I have found her without the trouble of searching for her ! How strange a thing is chance !

"Still, the meeting is an annoying one. If the damsel is running after Count René, the idea will naturally occur to her to look for him at his farm at Brouage. The two lovers have perhaps arranged to meet there, for it seems to me impossible that they should have failed to see one another at

the cottage, where, according to all appearance, the young man has been lying ill. The deuce fly away with them! You will realise, my dear Sophie, that their presence in the vicinity of the golden harvest would hamper me a great deal, although the count is undoubtedly unaware of the existence of the treasure. That member of the Brouage family is not a Carbonaro. He lacks his brother's way of looking at things, and he is not, like Fabien, in the secret of the conspiracy. Never mind, I have now two bad cards in my hand. I shall try to discard them, and I think that by acting promptly and playing boldly, I shall win the game."

This time, there was nothing more, and the countess, somewhat annoyed by the postscript, rose to secrete the precious letter from her old accomplice in a safe place. She spent the entire day in reflecting over her Alphonse's chances of success, and, after weighing the difficulty of the enterprise in the scales against the ability of the Duke of Otranto's pupil, she regained confidence. When she retired at night, she firmly believed in victory. Although she no longer had any pretensions to Loquetières' exclusive affection, she would have been delighted to learn that he was not disposed to lay his millions at the feet of Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier. She fell asleep reading *Paul; or, The Deserted Wife*, a romance by Ducray Duminiil, which had charmed her under the Directory, and her dreams were golden.

XIX.

By the same post that brought Sophie Cruchot the above missive from her gallant Alphonse, Octavie received a long letter from her father; and at the same moment when Sophie was reading her old friend's epistle, Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier was perusing a full account of the journey written by the worthy chevalier. He had parted from his daughter one evening after giving her his instructions as to the way in which she ought to act during his absence, and at the house on the Place Royale everything went on as though its owner had been there.

Octavie was scarcely of age, but she knew how to govern herself and others also. Her servants obeyed her implicitly, and her conduct gave no cause for remark. Since Saint-Hélier had left, she had not set foot out of doors, and no one had come to see her. She had given orders that even all regular visitors should not be received. Marcas had not returned, and the only man whom the golden-haired beauty would not have closed her doors upon, the Marquis de Brouage, had not called upon her, although, after her interview with him, he had announced his intention of soon doing so.

On the morrow of that interview, Saint-Hélier being still in Paris, Octavie, with his permission, had driven to the Faubourg du Roule, and asked to see the woman with the velvet mask. But the interesting stranger had sent word by Teresa that she was far from well, and could not see her.

Octavie had not yet renewed the attempt. She intended to do so later on, when Marcas returned; and she had already arranged a plan for getting rid of her dangerous suitor. She was not, however, without anxiety as to his intentions, for she knew the violence of his temper, and had no desire for his return.

Not having heard from him since the famous performance of *Ogier the Dane*, she hoped that he would be detained in the provinces some time longer by his wound.

As for her well-beloved father, Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier waited patiently enough for news of him, for she had little belief in the millions on which his hopes were fixed, and it was without the least eagerness that she began to read his letter, which ran as follows:—

“My dear child,—I did not make you a positive promise to write, knowing by experience that the post is not safe, but I have taken measures to make it so in this instance, and I am sure that this letter will reach you without being unsealed. I only partially confided matters to you before leaving, and I did not tell you where I was going. You did not inquire, or seem to be disturbed at the thought that your father was about to undertake a perilous task, which, if it succeeded, would make us immensely rich. But that was right. I saw my own coolness in your nature, and felt proud of you. Still, you must now know where I am, and also where I am now going, if only to help me should I require you to do so.

“The millions which I wish to bring you are hidden in an old ruined château on the coast of Saintonge. They belong to some men who are preparing a revolution against the government, and I shall be acting the part of a good citizen in taking them.

“How did I discover this important secret? This I will tell you later on. It now suffices to speak of the danger of the undertaking. I have found out the password of the conspirators, and I know that the keepers of the treasure will deliver it up to me without making any difficulty. I shall therefore have no struggle to enter upon to obtain possession of tons of gold, yes, *tons*, my dearly beloved Octavie; and this is fortunate, for with my disposition, and at my age, I cannot undertake forcible measures. The great difficulty will consist in carrying the gold away, and in placing such an enormous amount of metal in a safe place. But I have a somewhat ingenious plan of my own, and shall doubtless succeed.

“On leaving Paris I did not foresee other difficulties, but some complications have arisen, as you will see further on, and very unexpected ones. I allude particularly to one point. But I shall not be embarrassed, believe me; these matters may delay but cannot prevent my success. I will now tell you about my journey.

“The château where the treasure lies is at a short distance from Rochefort, and—why should I conceal it from you—it belongs to the nephews of the Marquis de Brouage. This surprises you, does it not?”

Octavie indeed started as she read this passage, and felt the liveliest surprise; she fancied for a few moments that Count René might own half the treasure, and blamed herself for having scorned his love, but she was soon undeceived, for her father's letter continued: “It is, indeed, very surprising. But the elder of these gentlemen, the one who is courting you, is entirely unaware that the ruined château which belonged to his ancestors shelters a treasure; the younger one, Viscount Fabien, who is a ‘liberal,’ knows, however, that these millions are hidden in a building which he owns, conjointly with his brother, Count René. It is he, according to all appearance, who has allowed the conspirators to dispose of his vaults to store their gold. But he has not the smallest right over the riches which his accomplices wish to employ for the furtherance of their unlawful designs. I will not tell you by what deductions, drawn from information which chance placed in my way, I succeeded in learning all this. But I assure you that I am now acting upon certainties, and I have done right in selecting Rochefort as my headquarters,

"I took the diligence on Tuesday night. It leaves for Rochefort three times a week, and brought me there in less than sixty hours. I had the best place in the coach, and was already seated in it twenty minutes before it was time to start, not caring to find myself in the Cour des Messageries in the midst of the crowd that is always there at starting. I wished and still wish, to preserve the strictest incognito. So I procured two passports with false names. On the one, which I have so far used, there figures the name of a merchant. I put on attire and made up a face suited to this calling. You may remember, although you were then but a child, that, in Germany, fifteen years ago, I sometimes disguised myself so as to execute certain tasks which the Count de Provence did me the honour to order of me; and if you can recall the facts, you will remember that you could not at all recognise me in those disguises. I still possess the great art of making up my face on necessary occasions, and I assure you that I can defy the most skilful spies.

"There were three of us in the coupé, and I naturally began by examining my two travelling companions. My immediate neighbour, who was in the middle, was an insignificant looking man. He seemed quiet enough, and had a timid and retiring manner. I soon learned that he was a professor of mathematics at Rochefort. The other was a sort of cox-comb, dressed in fine style, but looking countrified to a degree. He had black hair and whiskers, and a little black moustache. His eyeglass hung from his neck, and a book lay on his knees. He seemed to be a sort of provincial poet or a man just beginning to scribble. I don't know why this individual made me anxious. I thought that he had a sly look, and I am never mistaken. I pretended to doze, in order to have a better chance of looking at him at my ease, and every time that, over my neighbour the professor's head, I glanced at his half-open eyelids, I saw that he was persistently looking at me. It was evident that the rascal was spying upon me. Why? I did not yet guess why.

"On the morrow, however, when we were leaving the breakfast-table at Chartres, this individual contrived to pass out of the dining-room just as I did, and with apparent heedlessness he knocked off my spectacles, which are of a rather peculiar shape, in order to hide my eyes the better. He made many apologies, but I had understood his intentions, and I had sworn that I would find out whom I had to deal with. It did not take me long. The sound of his voice had startled me. I thought that it seemed familiar. But I did not succeed in remembering where I had heard it before.

"At last, towards noon, he fell asleep in his corner. It was frightfully warm, and the sunlight streamed down on his peculiar countenance. I examined it very closely, and caught sight of a mole on which there were some light hairs. This was a revelation. I examined the man's complexion, which I had not noticed before. It was light and ruddy, covered with tiny freckles. And yet his hair was jet black, as well as his whiskers and moustache.

"I felt quite sure at once that the scamp had made up his face. So I had a point to start from, but I had to think how such a man would look if not made up, and how I had seen him look. I succeeded at last in my endeavours. Prepare yourself, my dear child, for a great surprise. This spurious country dandy and artificial blackbeard was a man who is neither a *beau* nor a provincial, a man whose natural hair is as red as Judas Iscariot's, in a word, it was Loquetières!"

The chevalier had not been mistaken as to Octavie's probable astonish-

ment at this revelation. She was so much surprised that she read the passage over again and again, in order to make sure that she had not taken one name for another.

"Yes, Loquetières," continued Saint-Hélier's letter, "in flesh and blood, and he was playing the part of an archaeologist, for he told his neighbour, the professor, that he was travelling for the purpose of studying historical monuments. He ought to have chosen something better than that, for the dunce does not know anything whatever about antiquities. But his mistakes are not the question. What has he come to Rochefort for? I immediately asked myself that question. Can he have discovered the existence of the treasure, and is he trying, like myself, to find the Golden Fleece? I thought it improbable and even impossible. How could he know about it? I only discovered it through very peculiar circumstances. I dwelt, however, upon a very probable supposition. Loquetières belongs to the Ministry of the Interior, and often has charge of political work. I never told you this, but you would not be my daughter if you had not guessed it already. I think that the government may have heard of the Bonapartist and liberal intrigues now rife in Saintonge, and that Loquetières has been sent here to feel the public pulse.

"Be it as it may, I shall be on my guard, but I can assure you that he did not recognize me and would be still more puzzled by the new disguise which I shall assume to-morrow. It takes sharper eyes than his to detect so experienced a man as I am. I don't make mistakes of a foolish kind, or put on whiskers that do not match my complexion.

"Besides, Loquetières, after his first attempt at spying, kept quiet. He was even polite and attentive. At Poitiers I was delayed in going up a hill, and the diligence went on without me. This accident might have made me lose precious time. Fortunately, I found a peasant's cart which I hired, so I overtook the coach at the second stage. The driver and my two companions in the diligence thought that I had gone ahead, and M. de la Braise, as Loquetières now calls himself, congratulated me very warmly on not being left on the road. Was he sincere? I have no serious reason for thinking otherwise. My prudence, however, was not disarmed, and if my former friend has any bad intentions I shall frustrate them.

"I need not add, my dear child, that, as a son-in-law, I do not wish to hear any more of Loquetières. As I told you on the night when we went to the Panorama Dramatique, he is not fitted to aspire to my daughter's hand, and I even intend, when I have succeeded, to drop his acquaintance. This will be easy, for we shall first go to England, and perhaps, to Germany, a little later on. I know some of the princes who belong to the Germanic Confederation and who, though they reign over thousands of subjects, would not scorn a morganatic marriage with the handsomest woman in Europe, for they are less rich than she will be in a fortnight's time from now."

At this passage Octavie shrugged her shoulders. She was much more practical than her father; and preferred to make the conquest of a French peer, to winning a prince beyond the Rhine, besides, triumphing at once, instead of waiting for the fanciful success which Saint-Hélier so pompously announced.

"To finish about Loquetières," continued the chevalier, "I must tell you that I left him when we reached Rochefort. He went to the best

hotel here, whereas I went to a little inn where the landlord is under obligations to me. I can change my dress and name, so as to throw all the spies in creation off the track, and I will answer for it, that the false antiquarian won't find me again. In a short time you will hear from me, unless complete and immediate success should enable me to return to Paris; but, before closing my letter, I must tell you of another meeting. This was almost as startling as the first one. Yesterday, at Niort, when dining at the hotel, I found myself face to face with my secretary. Marcas asked, you remember, for leave of absence to go to see his father in the south, and here he was in the west. I am sure he did not recognise either me or Loquetières, and you may be sure that I did not speak to him. But I ventured to make quiet inquiries, and learned that he had come from Rochefort by coach.

"What can he have been doing at this seaport? It is a mystery to me. He cannot know anything about the treasure, besides, he is going back to Paris. I think it more likely that he is acquainted with some of the bad fellows who are conspiring in these liberal regions, for I heard that the young scamp was meddling with politics. You, perhaps, know more than I do about it, as he has had the audacity to write to you since he left, but I shall not ask you to tell me. It suffices that he should be kept away from our house, for I don't intend to allow him to come there again. You promised to send him away if he dared to present himself. I rely on your promise, and in order that you may take your precautions, I warn you that he will undoubtedly reach Paris on the same day that this letter comes to hand. And now, my dear Octavie, I send you the tender kiss of a father who loves you better than his life, and I hope that I shall soon make you the richest and happiest of women."

As soon as Octavie had read this paternal epistle, she hastened to her writing-desk, where she kept her letters. She threw her father's missive into one of the drawers, and began to write a note, which was certainly not addressed to the absent chevalier, for she did not have his address. Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier acted on impulse at all times, and went straight to her aim. In the whole letter, but one thing interested her. Marcas, whom she thought still detained for some time by his wound, was returning and was cured. He must even now be in Paris. He would burst in upon her present intrigues like a furious wild boar plunging among a bird-catcher's snares. He would rend her plottings asunder.

"I have not a moment to lose," she muttered. "If he arrived this morning, he will do what he has warned me of, to-night. He won't dare to appear here, because he does not know that my father is away, but he will throw the key of the garden he speaks of into this room—well, I must take care to close the window, for I must see the marquis here to-night?"

Then, with a mysterious smile upon her lips, she sat down and wrote a letter.

XX.

SINCE Fabien de Brouage had parted with Stella Negroni at the door of the house where she resided, in the Faubourg du Roule, he had lived in alternate hope and fear, which finally brought on feverish excitement. Stella loved him. She had confessed it on awaking from her swoon. She had

agreed to go with him to another country. But she had made him promise not to try to see her again before ten days had elapsed, and he would not break his word.

The hours seemed ages, and he spent them almost all in wandering about near the house where he was forbidden to show himself. He always expected to see Stella emerge from it, and hoped to gaze upon her from afar, trusting that she would perceive him and make a sign of encouragement.

But the door did not open either for himself or for the lady with the velvet mask, or even for the servants. It seemed as though no one lived in the house. Fabien did not dare to ask any questions in the neighbourhood. His continual going and coming was but too apparent already, and he feared he might awaken the suspicions of the neighbours, who frequently saw him pass before their shops. He was, therefore, reduced to counting the days, which still separated him from the happy moment of meeting, and he felt all the more impatient from the fact that he was living in utter idleness.

The grandmaster of the Coral Pin Association had given no signs of life, of late, Colonel Fournès had not shown himself, and Fabien no longer tried to meet them. The passion which filled his heart absorbed him to such an extent that he thought no more, either of politics or the Carbonari. He had not seen his brother since the day after the Tivoli entertainment, and had not even taken the trouble to learn if he were still in Paris or had gone to Saintonge. What did it matter to him now, that a treasure was hidden in the ruins of his château? The high *venta* had plenty of agents to watch over its millions, and if Fabien, who hoped to leave France with Stella, had proposed a visit to Brouage it was merely in order to sail secretly from the neighbourhood.

Gambling had placed him in possession of a large sum, and he had no further need to mortgage his farm to procure the funds needed for the intended journey. He had had no more news of the Baroness de Casanova, and from her silence he concluded that she had nothing fresh to tell him. If he had known that Francesca's last letter had been intercepted by Saint-Hélîer, he would have been less at ease; but he thought no more of the Dark Room than he did of the Carbonari.

The baroness's correspondence passed through the hands of his old friend and former teacher, Lormier, the Conventional, who, since he had returned to France, had been hiding under the name of Morlier, in the Quartier Latin, where he was living by giving lessons in mathematics. The regicide, for such he was in principle, naturally conspired against the Bourbons. He presided over a central *venta*, and it was he who had initiated Fabien as a Carbonaro, just as in London, he had taught him the doctrine of social equality.

Lormier loved Fabien as a son, but he loved revolutionary ideas still more. He was a sincere fanatic, ready to sacrifice anything to his ideas, incapable of trifling with what he considered his duty, and pitiless as regards human weakness. He despised love and admired Brutus. Fabien often went to see him, in order to listen to what he believed to be apostolic words. He consulted him, and often followed the advice he gave.

But since all his thoughts had been given to Stella, he repaired less frequently to his friend's rooms, and, as a result, the stern old man was unsparing in his remonstrances whenever they met. He reproached Fabien with neglecting the affairs of the Coral Pin Association, and with leading a reckless life. He had consented, unwillingly enough, to be his inter-

mediary in receiving the letters sent by Francesca Ranese, and would have absolutely refused to do so had he thought that his disciple was wildly in love with the baroness's asserted niece.

One day, Fabien, amid the anxiety he felt while waiting to see Stella, thought of calming himself by paying a visit to his friend ; but when he repaired to the Rue de l'Eperon, where Lormier lived, he was greatly surprised to learn that the old professor was travelling. And he was still more startled when, at his own door on returning home, he found a stranger, who handed him a letter, and went away at once.

The missive was from Lormier, who wrote as follows :

"Brother,—I ought not to let you know where I am, or why I have left Paris, but you and a relative of yours are concerned in the matter, and I wish that you should know what is going on. It is the great possible proof of my affection, and if I esteemed you less I should not be so frank with you. Learn then, that the high *venta* having been informed that your elder brother was going to his farm at Brouage, resolved to prevent him from arriving there.

"One of the brethren was therefore sent ahead with orders to create obstacles to stop him on the way. It was not desirable, nor would you have wished it yourself, that Count René should discover the secret on which the safety of our Association depends. He would not have failed to discover it if he had been allowed to reach the farm, for he would have seen the Italian woman who sometimes writes to you. The member charged with this mission could not find any better way than to quarrel with your brother, challenge him, and give him a sword thrust.

"Do not be alarmed, however ; Count René is not dead. He was only wounded, and will probably recover. You have turned pale ; I can see it as though I were beside you. You feel indignant at such severe measures. You are cursing me, and if I were near by, you would reproach me bitterly for not having pre-warned you in order to put you upon your guard, so that you might have kept your brother in Paris.

"You could not have done so, however. My duty was to remain silent. And I did my duty, and I do not regret it. I only regret one thing, that the man selected by the high *venta* to prevent your brother from reaching Brouage, should turn out to be unworthy of its confidence. He is now suspected of having betrayed us, and I have reason to think that he has really done so. You will agree with me, probably, when I tell you his name. As he was suspected, I was sent from Paris. The leaders of the Coral Pin Association considered that our treasure was no longer safe at your château, so they decided to re-embark it on board the ship on which it remained so long. I having been selected to direct this delicate operation, left Paris on Tuesday evening by coach, and I have just arrived at Rochefort, where I was received by one of the brethren.

"It is useless to tell you how I shall set about removing our gold, but it is important that you should know of certain incidents of my journey, for I need your help to ward off a danger with which I am about to acquaint you.

"I had secured a seat in the *coupé*, and I found myself seated between two individuals whom I immediately thought suspicious. One of them looked rather elderly, the other as if he were middle aged, and the latter at once tried to engage me in conversation. I had foreseen such an occurrence, and I told him that I could not keep up a conversation, as I was very

hard of hearing. This course averted embarrassing questions, and besides, it might have enabled me to overhear things which would not otherwise have been said in my presence. However, my travelling companions did not chat together. The younger one certainly tried to converse, but the elder only answered in monosyllables. I soon saw that they were both of them disguised, and that they were spying upon each other.

"On the following day I made several other discoveries. At Chartres on leaving the inn where we had dined, the elder man let fall his glasses, and I immediately recognised him, having often seen him in London, where he was the secret agent of the Count de Provence. He was then called the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier, and since his return to France, he must have been engaged on secret work. He has a very beautiful daughter who is thought to have led your brother astray.

"At Tours, I penetrated another mystery. In the office of the hotel which I entered by chance just after dinner, I saw the younger man adjusting the false moustache and whiskers which he had donned to disguise himself, and I immediately knew what to think as regards him. The rascal is the police spy who arrested Colonel Fournès in 1817. His name is Loquetières. They both arrived at Rochefort at the same time as myself. What have they come here for? I fear that they have been sent here to spy upon us, the police having heard of the landing of our treasure on this coast. Still, it is evident that they are not acting in concert. Loquetières tried to cause Saint-Hélier to be left behind on the road, and though he did not succeed in the attempt, it was no fault of his. However, their presence here is none the less alarming, and I shall act with the greatest caution. I shall not attempt to embark the gold until I know their projects.

"But this is not all. Another complication has arisen which I wish to apprise you of as you may help me to prevent it having any consequence. Mademoiselle de Brouage, your first cousin, the daughter of your uncle the marquis, is at Rochefort at the same hotel as Loquetières. There is an Englishwoman with her. Why has she left her father's house? Is she running about after your brother, who is still at the hamlet where he was wounded, nine miles from the town? Can you answer this question? I do not know, but I ask it. Besides, I am afraid that your cousin or brother, or both of them, are thinking of going to Brouage. It is exactly this which the high *venta* wishes to prevent. Its agent has served it badly. This agent is a good-for-nothing fellow named Marcas, who is secretary to Saint-Hélier."

"The scamp whom I met at the Tivoli Gardens!" exclaimed Fabien. "So it was he who wounded René!"

Feeling anxious to learn more, he then hastily finished reading the message.

"This Marcas must now be in Paris," added Morlier. "We met at a *table d'hôte*, where all the passengers of the coaches to and from Paris were seated. He knows me and I know him, but I took good care not to speak to him in presence of the two spies. I come to the principal purpose of my letter, my dear boy, which is to beg of you to come in person to the farm as soon as possible. I take upon myself to ask this of you, without informing the high *venta* that I have summoned you, for the matter is urgent, and you alone can ward off the danger which threatens us through your brother and cousin. I will undertake to keep the spies off. You must undertake to keep the lovers away. If you have not changed, and are still

devoted to our noble cause, start on the very day that this letter reaches you, which it will through a safe person—start without telling anyone, and go straight to the farm. It is probable that you will find me there. If not, I have sure means of knowing of your arrival, and arranging a meeting. You see that I still have faith in you. I trust that I shall not have cause to repent it.”

This concise and energetic message was not signed, but Fabien knew the writing and the style of the old member of the Convention.

“Start at once!” he muttered; “it is impossible. It would be renouncing Stella. What do I care for the treasure? René is safe, and the man who wounded him must be in Paris. I will find the scamp. I must do so, and when I have, I will kill him like a dog. I told him that I would expose him to the high *venta*, if he dared to injure my brother in any way, but that will not satisfy my desire for revenge, and besides, the high *venta* condemned René, set Marcas upon his path, and would refuse to do me justice. No, I won’t appeal to them, and Marcas shall die by my hand alone.”

Fabien thought that Saint-Hélicr’s secretary would not fail to repair to Octavie’s house, and that the surest way to meet him would be to wait for him on the Place Royale. Then his thoughts reverted to Stella, and he cursed the oath that he had taken not to see her again before the delay which she had asked for was over. Between then and the day appointed, there might be many disasters.

He felt that the Carbonari were suspicious as regarded himself, and he wondered what could have been plotted against him and Stella through Herdandez, who had remained invisible since the scene in the Tivoli Gardens. The calm which now reigned on all sides was threatening, and foretold a storm. However, Fabien did not fear lightning or thunder. He was ready to brave every kind of danger. He longed to avenge his brother by killing Marcas, and to fly from France with Stella; and he said to himself that René, cured of his wound and his fatal passion, would perhaps also leave the country. He was too much troubled to give a thought to the pure young girl who was now the object of the Count de Brouage’s adoration.

XXI.

BROUAGE, the little town of which René bore the name, as his ancestors had formerly been lords of the district, is no longer even the capital of a canton, although three centuries ago it was an important fortified place. It played a great part in the struggles of the League. Later on, Richelieu spent a large amount of money in fortifying it, and Mazarin shut up his niece, Marie de Maucini, there when the young king, Louis XIV., wanted to marry her. Of so glorious a past, however, there nowadays remains but the recollection, with a well preserved rampart, and the largest powder magazine in all France. But this is empty, and there are no cannon on the walls.

Brouage, which counted formerly three thousand inhabitants, has now less than six hundred, and the company of infantry sent to garrison the place is renewed every month.

Marsh-fever has depopulated this historical fortress. Situated amid the lowlands which stretch between the mouth of the Charente and that of the

Seudre, Brouage is surrounded by salt marshes and muddy canals which are fatal to life. The country is flat, and the coast sandy; the sea which bathes the shore, on which there are no rocks, is calm and quiet. Pent in by the island of Oleron, the tides are extremely high and low. When the water recedes, it leaves a vast shore uncovered, and when the high winds blow from the west it does not rise into tumultuous breakers, but beats with a dull sound against the dykes, and by perseverance carries them away. You there have a bay, a gulf, or a roadstead, but not the ocean.

Large vessels cannot venture there, and small ones only approach with caution. The *Stromboli*, which had carried the treasures of the Carbonari, had had infinite trouble to land its precious cargo, and would never have succeeded without the aid of a pilot who belonged to the place. This pilot, a seaman who had retired after serving thirty years, was a Bonapartist, and a Knight of Liberty. In 1815, when Napoleon fled to Rochefort after Waterloo, and was trying to leave France, the old fellow offered to pilot a bark, upon which the Emperor might, without being seen, pass through the English fleet, which blockaded every creek. His name was Pierre Moëse, and he usually lived at Saint-Trojan, on the island of Oleron, but for three months past he had been sojourning at the farm where Francesca Ranese had found a refuge. The high *venta* wished to have such an able auxiliary near at hand, in case unforeseen events necessitated the removal of the treasure. The *Stromboli* had orders to cruise about in the open, and to appear from time to time at the head of the bay. Signals previously agreed upon would summon it to the shore when needed. Pierre Moëse had his boat moored in the little river which forms the haven of Brouage, and which crosses the property restored to the marquis's nephews in 1814. Their land yielded more salt than corn, for, from time immemorial, most of that part of Saintonge has been transformed into salt marshes. Still, there were fields, and even trees. The farm buildings rose up between a meadow and well cultivated garden, shaded by old elms, bent by the breeze from the open, but withal vigorous and leafy.

Besides the farmer's dwelling-place, the barns and granaries, the stables and cart-sheds, there was a large house for the landlords, conveniently built, and with sufficient furniture for comfort.

A few hundreds yards distant, on a height girt round with sandflats, there rose a keep-tower almost intact, and the last relic of the ancient fortress of Brouage, built in the fifteenth century. The château had suffered less from time than from the political vicissitudes of France. Civil wars between Catholics and Protestants had greatly damaged it; 1792 had completed its ruin. At that time the revolutionary committee of Rochefort even decreed that it should be demolished. But powder was scarce, and a great quantity was required to blow it up. So the iconoclasts contented themselves with handing it over to the peasants, who came from thirty miles around to fetch stones for building purposes. They had not time to utterly destroy the château, however, and when the two brothers resumed possession of it on the return of the Bourbons, the great central tower was still standing. It still had a stately look with its battlements, machicolations and barbicans. The moat around it was dry, the draw-bridge no longer existed, nor the portcullis either, but the spiral staircase was perfect; the vaulted ceilings of the rooms where men-at-arms had formerly lodged, were still quite solid, and there was not a slab wanting on the platform.

This isolated tower could be seen far off at sea, and it served as a land-

mark for the ships which came for a provision of salt at the Ile d'Oleron before starting for the Newfoundland cod fisheries. It also served as an observatory for Pierre Moëse, who made long stays there, with his eyes fixed upon the passages where the Neapolitan brig often appeared. While the watchman was above, down below there were the guardians of the treasure, the four sons of old Mornac, the farmer. The father and sons were altogether devoted to Fabien, and obeyed him in all things. They had but seldom seen Count René.

Mornac, the father, had formerly held revolutionary views, and his sons were no better royalists than he was. They watched over the treasure of the Carbonari in turns, and would have died rather than give it up. They were all strong, able-bodied men, capable of using their fists vigorously, and if need be there were their knives as well.

The vault where they mounted guard was at the base of the tower, below the level of the soil. It had formerly been, not a secret dungeon, as the local traditions maintained, but a store place for food and liquor to sustain and quench the thirst of the defenders of the castle. Casks of wine had now been replaced by barrels full of gold.

For three months past, the Mornacs had been living under the good-natured rule of the ex-Baroness de Casanova. Fabien had delegated his powers to her, and had not been to the château since her arrival there, attired as a peasant-woman of Saintonge. Francesca had succeeded in winning the respect and love of these rough adherents of the Coral Pin Association. And, thanks to the prudence from which they never departed, her prolonged stay at the farm had not yet excited any suspicion on the part of the salt-dealers at work in the neighbouring marshes. She was thought to be a relative of the Mornacs, who having passed her earlier years in Marseilles had returned to these cousins of hers when she became a widow. Everything went well in this respect; but the poor baroness found her exile extremely irksome. The letter intercepted by Saint-Hélier was evidence of this, and as it had never reached its address, the viscount had not replied to Francesca. So that in the result great anxiety was added to her weariness.

Fearing, not without reason, that her letter had fallen into bad hands, she did not dare to write again, but lived in a state of perpetual apprehension. For fear of discouraging the brave fellows about her who seconded her efforts, she abstained from telling them of her terrors; but she had lost her liveliness, and no longer laughed or stirred about the place, or took care of the garden and poultry-yard as she had done at first. She spent her nights in fancying a thousand frightful things, often consulting the cards, like a true Neapolitan, and sitting for hours gazing at the sky and the sea.

As soon as the sun began to set, she walked towards the ruined château, said a few words to the sentinel at the vault, and then climbed the spiral staircase to the platform, where she always found Pierre Moëse, the old pilot. They remained there for hours, indeed, until the damp night air drove the sensitive Italian home, talking about the evolutions of the brig *Stromboli*, or of such items of news flying about the country as the sailor picked up along the coast. Then the baroness dejectedly went back to the farm where she shared the Mornacs' evening meal, and on leaving table she often regretted the card-parties at her house in the Rue de Monsieur. The Jacobin peasantry knew nothing of *bouillote* or *écarté*, and as the priest of Brouage never came near the farm, Francesca had not even a chance to play a game of *piquet*.

One day, when the time seemed even longer to her than usual, she repaired very early to the tower platform where she found Pierre scanning the horizon, telescope in hand. The sky was unusually clear for that misty region. The north wind had driven away all the clouds, and the tide slowly rising was spreading its blue waters over the grey sands of the bay. From the summit of the tower the view extended far into the distance; the Ile d'Aix, the Ile Boyard were clearly distinguished, and on the opposite side the sandhills extending to the mouth of the Gironde. The picture was vast, but usually melancholy in aspect. That day, however, it was lit up by a dazzling sunset, and only some "parasol" pines were needed to make one think oneself on the shores of the Mediterranean. A rosy glow tinged the coast, and a silvery hue came over the salt marshes. The baroness did not admire these marvellous effects of light; she had not, like the old pilot, fixed her eyes upon the Straits of Maumusson, or the Straits of Antioch through which channels, ships coming from the high seas must pass when approaching Brouage. On the contrary, she kept her eyes obstinately fixed upon the road to Rochefort. It was in this direction that she looked for help, hoping to see Fabien ride up to relieve her of her tiresome duties, or, at all events, some messenger appear, sent by the leader of the Coral Pin Association, and disguised as a pedlar, as she had suggested in her letter. She did not go so far as to flatter herself that Cecilia would make her appearance, although her dearest wish was to embrace her after so long a separation. However, like Sister Anne, Francesca usually saw nothing coming along the dusty road at her feet. But a surprise was reserved for her that evening.

Pierre Moëse, after closing his telescope, bent over the parapet above the sands; and the baroness heard him mutter:

"Good! there are some people coming here."

She turned and saw a procession coming across the sandy flat. There were half a dozen mules in a file, laden with packages and driven by men afoot. The leader of the caravan was riding on ahead upon a sorry-looking mare. He was dressed like a tourist, and in one hand he held a huge umbrella with which he sheltered himself from the sun.

"What are these people coming here for?" asked Francesca.

"It's easy to guess. They have come to count the stones in the keep. Learned men from Rochefort or La Rochelle, of course, 'humbugs' such as we have seen so many of."

"You are mistaken, Pierre. If they came from the town they wouldn't approach by the shore."

"Yes, they might. They must have come down the Charente to Fort du Peu, and then have followed the coast. There is a ferry there for crossing the Brouage canal. And I'll bet that they've come to see the tower. Look! They are coming up by the path between the sand-banks."

"True," murmured the baroness. "I will go down to warn Jean, who is on the watch in the vault."

"I will do that," said the pilot. "It would perhaps be better for you to talk with the man who seems to be the head of the party, that tall Nicodemus on the yellow mare. As the mules carry baggage, it looks as though the captain were going to put in here."

"You are right," replied Francesca, who was somewhat alarmed, "I will receive him."

She was still active, in spite of her stoutness, and soon reached the bottom of the spiral staircase. At the moment when she was about to go

out by the ogival-doorway overlooking the moat, she saw the stranger rein up his mare on the opposite bank.

He was looking at the keep with great attention, and seemed to be a travelling antiquarian. The baroness gazed with some apprehension at this visitor, whose eyes seemed to measure the height of the tower, and she asked herself whether she should cross the moat or wait till he came towards her. The stranger put an end to her hesitation by alighting. He threw the bridle of his horse to one of the men who accompanied him, crossed the dry moat, took off his straw hat with a polite gesture, and said: "Excuse me, madame, for intruding upon your grounds. You are, no doubt, the lady of the manor?"

If Francesca had really been a peasant, this remark would have flattered her, for peasants, as well as shop girls, are delighted at being taken for ladies. She was dressed as a peasant-woman of Saintonge, and there was nothing of the feudal dame in her appearance. So it was not possible that the traveller could have mistaken her for the lady of the château, and his words at once put her upon her guard.

"No, sir," she hastily replied, "the château does not belong to me. It belongs to Messieurs de Brouage, our masters. I am a cousin of their farmer."

"What a delightful part of the country this is where farmers' cousins look like princesses!" exclaimed the gallant individual who appeared to have made up his mind to use the flowery language of a paladin. "I saw you from afar, fair lady, and upon the battlements of this ancient castle you looked like a noble damsel, watching for the return of your father from the Crusades. A page stood beside you, and in his hand I saw a horn, which he was about to sound to apprize the vassals of the approach of a cavalcade."

The page was Pierre Moëse, the pilot of Saint-Trojan; the horn was the telescope, with which the old sea-dog had scanned the sea. The baroness understood all this, but she asked herself whether the new-comer were mad, or merely a rural simpleton. She had, however, presence of mind enough to seem to be simple-minded, and to mutter, as she pinched a corner of her apron: "Excuse me, sir, but I don't understand what you mean."

"Delicious simplicity!" exclaimed the poetic tourist. "I see, charming villager, that I must tell you my name, and explain why I have come here. My name is Charles de la Braise, I am a landowner and vice-president of the Antiquarian Society of Picardy. I have left the château of my ancestors to inspect and draw the ruins of the monuments of former days. I am an humble pilgrim enamoured of the recollections of other times, and travelling through our beautiful France. Since I have seen you I congratulate myself on having begun by Saintonge." The perambulating archæologist emphasized this speech with a languishing look, which failed to take effect.

"You wish to visit the tower then, sir, and examine it?" said Francesca.

"From top to bottom, fair damsel, or rather from bottom to top, for I shall begin by the vaults. I not only wish to examine the tower, but to measure it, and make drawings of it in all its aspects, and describe it. It will be the subject of a paper, which I shall submit to my learned colleagues on my return to Amiens. With this view I have taken my precautions so as to be able to spend a few days comfortably at the foot of this venerable pile. I have brought some faithful servants, who will here put up a tent

for me. That is the way in which the Viscount de Châteaubriand travelled in Palestine."

"A tent!" repeated the amazed baroness.

"Of course. You see, amiable native of Saintonge, those long-eared animals over there? Well, they have my baggage on their backs and provisions to sustain us all. If you would deign to come and share my humble repast beneath my canvas roof, you would be very welcome."

Francesca did not reply to this gracious invitation. She was in consternation at learning that the stranger proposed to camp out with his servants so near the treasure. She had already had to deal with other antiquarians, but they had not installed themselves so near the ruins. They came in the morning and left in the evening. They had done no more than ramble about the rooms, and up and down the stairs. Besides, they came alone or with one or two old fogies like themselves—whom one of the Mornacs could have held in check; whilst this archaeologist from Picardy had four ill-looking robust fellows with him. He did not, however, seem very suspicious to the baroness. She was not cunning enough to guess that the wig and whiskers of M. Charles de la Braise disguised the spy whose appearance at the rooms in the Rue de Monsieur, had been the cause of her leaving Paris. She instinctively mistrusted him, but not more than she would have mistrusted any other stranger, and she thought of taking her precautions.

"My good sir," said she, "you will find it very disagreeable to live here in that way. It is very unhealthy at night among the sandhills."

"Oh! I am not afraid of the weather," said the false antiquarian, with a careless air. "When a man is devoted to science, he cares nothing for wind and rain."

"There will be rain to-night, and a good deal of it. It is clouding over now, and a storm is near."

"Well, then, if the tempest bursts forth, we will take shelter in the vaults of the tower, like the gallant knights who formerly defended it. But allow me, fair denizen of the coast, to give a few orders to my servants."

And without awaiting Francesca's reply, Loquetières bowed politely, and hastened to the men of his escort, who had already begun to unload the mules. "It is she," he said to them. "She cannot deceive me with her cap and apron."

"She is a fine woman," growled a tall muscular fellow who was at the head of the party.

"Splendid, but we did not come here for her fine eyes. Put up the tent in the moat, unload the provisions, drive in some stakes, and tie up the mules and the mare without removing their saddles, for we shall do the work to-night. When you are settled, have something to eat and drink, and wait here for me. Don't leave this spot."

"All right, master!" said the four men at once. They were used to such work, and expert at it.

While Loquetières was telling them in a few words what to do, the baroness was making a heroic resolve. She had concluded that, instead of leaving the antiquarian to camp out near the keep, it would be better to induce him to lodge at the farm, even if she had to endure his insipid gallantry all the evening. By giving him shelter she could at least make sure that he would not go at night to prowl about the treasure.

"Sir," said she as soon as she returned from the moat, "I have been

reflecting, I must tell you. My employers would not like it if I allowed a nobleman, who has come to look at their tower, to sleep out in the open air. You must do us the honour to take supper with us and sleep under our roof. There is the viscount's room, and there is the count's also. You can take which you please, and you won't be sorry at having given up your tent. There's no fine company at the farm, but I assure you that you will be with respectable people."

"And with a charming woman," interrupted Loquetières. "Well, then, flower of Saintonge, I accept your kind offer, and shall be greatly pleased to accompany you presently to your rural abode; but before I do so, I should like to make a rapid survey of this keep, and profit by the last rays of the god of day to jot down a few notes. Forgive me for being an antiquarian, rather than a man just now, and deign to guide my footsteps through this monument of past ages."

"Very willingly," replied Francesca Ranese, who was not at all disposed to let the stranger roam alone about the rooms and stairways of the tower.

Loquetières had immediately understood that he might arouse the suspicions of the feminine delegate of the Carbonari if he persisted in passing the night near the moat. It seemed to him wiser to dine at the farm, and to let it be believed that he would sleep there. He relied upon being able to escape quietly by a door or window, and return to the keep to help his assistants in removing the treasure.

Loquetières had not lost his time at Rochefort. He had chartered a pretty decked boat from an old smuggler, who had agreed to take him where he pleased. This boat, which was moored under the Ile Madame, at the mouth of the Charente, was to arrive at midnight and wait below the Brouage sandbanks for a cargo which the mules would bring in several trips. Loquetières had calculated that five or six hours would suffice to remove and load the barrels of gold. The boat was quite large enough for himself, his servants, and the animals, and sailed well enough to take them to a point of the English coast, where the owner had friends who would help to land the contents unknown to anyone else.

Loquetières did not suppose that the tower was guarded. Fabien de Brouage had said nothing of that kind while talking to Cecilia in the box at the Panorama Dramatique. He had merely mentioned that Francesca was watching over the treasure, and this was all that Loquetières had ascertained on the point. Now it was certain that Francesca did not pass her nights in the ruined château. Moreover, she seemed amiably inclined, and everything seemed to augur that Loquetières' operations would prove successful.

However, Loquetières was glad to be able to study the scene of action, and it amused him to have the guardian of the treasure as his guide. He followed the baroness, who had gone ahead towards the spiral staircase, and who intended to take him at once to the platform, without approaching the vault where the gold was hidden. However, the spy wished and for good reasons, to begin at the beginning. "Excuse me, fair lady," said he, "but I should first like to see the subterranean vaults, of which I have heard so much."

"You allude to a kind of cellar down there, below these three stairs? There is nothing remarkable about it."

"Not to you, my innocent child, no doubt, but it is very interesting to me. It is by a profound study of the under-structure of a building that

we antiquarians can exactly decide its age. Crypts, my dear lady, have great importance in our eyes, and as there is one here I must not neglect seeing it."

Francesca made no further objection. This archæological language encouraged her, and she said to herself: "He is certainly some provincial pedant. There is no danger."

Loquetières had already gone down into the cellar, and she followed him. Her only fear was lest she might find Jean Mornac there mounting guard, and be obliged to explain the presence of her pretended cousin in the subterranean vault. But Jean was not there. The old pilot had had the same idea as Francesca, and had warned the guardian; they were now both of them on the platform. "Oho!" exclaimed the antiquarian from Picardy, "this is a fine specimen of architecture. This vault is an admirable one, the curves of the nervures, the abutments, the trefoils of the ogives are perfect, all of them—"

As he let fall these words, intended to mislead the baroness, Loquetières stamped about the low room, feebly lighted by an air hole, and he found that in the middle there was a decided depression of the soil, which seemed to have been lately dug up. "Good!" thought he. "The gold is hidden here. No flagstones to be taken up. Only two or three feet of soil to dig into. We have shovels and pickaxes, and it will be easy to manage it. Let us go upstairs, charming villager," he added aloud. "Whatever love I may have for science, I should reproach myself with detaining you any longer in these catacombs. Flowers love the sun, even when they are full blown.

Loquetières, after having abused archæology, was now trying, by his old-fashioned gallantry, to play the part of a stupid pedant, so that Francesca might not suspect him of being a spy. He fully succeeded, and when they reached the top of the keep, the baroness had quite recovered her gaiety.

Pierre Moëse and Jean Mornac did not expect them on the platform, nor did they hear them coming, for the wind was blowing a gale, and both were leaning upon the parapet overlooking the sea. The pilot was pointing out a white sail afar off, and Jean was saying:

"It is too close to land. It will soon be near the Pointe des Saumonards. The watch at the Ile d'Aix will point it out to the custom-house vessel."

"Besides, there is no reason for running such risks, for I have no orders to give," replied Pierre Moëse.

Loquetières was near the speakers, and the wind blew what they said right into his ear. "Good!" thought he, "I have no time to lose. That vessel over there will come for the treasure if I don't carry it off to-night."

"Who are these good people?" now asked the false antiquarian of the baroness.

"One is a sailor from the Ile d'Oleron, who often comes to bring us some fish," replied the supposed country-woman, "and the other is a cousin of mine. Here, Father Moëse! here, Jean!" she called out, "come and see this gentleman who has come expressly from Paris to see the tower."

At this call, which reached them in spite of the violence of the gale blowing the other way, the pilot and Jean Mornac turned round.

"Good-day, my friends, good-day," said Loquetières to them with the affable suavity of a nobleman, speaking to plebeians. "I have indeed come to see this fine keep, and I mean to spend a few days upon this coast. I even wished to camp out near the ruins. My servants are already settled

there ; but your kind countrywoman has offered me hospitality at the farm near by, and I cannot resist the request of such a charming person."

Pierre and Jean looked at the baroness, who winked significantly.

"I shall be charmed to see you there, my children," said La Braise in a fatherly manner, "to sit down to table with you. We will drink to the health of your noble masters, the Count and Viscount de Brouage."

"I have no master," replied Pierre Moëse, bluntly.

"True. I had forgotten that you are a sailor, my friend. Our charming farmer has just told me so. I am very fond of sailors. I should have liked to be a navigator, but my passion for historical works has kept me on *terra firma*. Still the sea greatly interests me, although I am but little familiar with its changes. What do you think this weather portends? I like to learn about such things, and I am curious to hear whether the sea will be calm to-night."

"To-night, you had better be ashore than afloat," replied the old pilot.

"How is that? Do you think that we shall have a storm? Why! the sunset is superb."

"In an hour from now there will be a strong nor' wester, and at midnight it will be devilish bad outside."

"At midnight," exclaimed Loquetières heedlessly. "Then you think, my friends, that a boat venturing into this bay would run some risk?"

"There isn't a sailor who would chance it. At midnight the tide will be very high, and with the wind beating a ship would be thrown upon the dyke and destroyed—and it wouldn't take long, either."

"The devil!" muttered Loquetières. "I shouldn't have thought that after so fine a day, we should be threatened with so bad a night. Then that vessel over there must be in danger?"

"What vessel? The vessels are all in the port at Rochefort, frigates and all."

"I mean that ship, the sails of which I can see on the horizon."

The antiquarian pointed out the brig belonging to the Carbonari, and it needed a good eyesight to detect the white speck now disappearing amid the rising fog.

"Oh! that one will get out of the scrape. It is going north, and when the blast comes on it will be a long way off."

"But a boat coming out of the Charente, for example—"

"Would be driven along by the current, and thrown upon the Roches d'Erre, and split into a thousand fragments."

"That would be dreadful," said Loquetières earnestly. "But do you think that the squall will last long?"

"Twenty-four hours, I should say. It will be a regular nor' wester, that's all!"

"Then the sea will be calm to-morrow night?"

"Like the Brouage river itself. Those squalls are soon over."

"Thanks for your information, my friend. Nothing interests me so much as the sea excepting archæology. If I had not other business of importance to attend to, I would settle here, at the foot of this poetic ruin, and enjoy the grand sight of the ocean."

"That would be a nice thing, indeed!" thought the sailor to himself.

The travelling antiquarian was not to his liking. He was surprised at his questions about time and tide; and even regretted having told him the exact truth.

However, Loquetières was now busily examining the Ile Madame towards

the north, where the boat which he had chartered must be at anchor by this time. Not a sail was to be seen upon the dark waves, and the sun had just vanished behind a purple cloud.

"My man won't dare come to-night," thought Sophie Cruchot's friend. "And even if he came, I shouldn't be such a fool as to venture upon his little nutshell. The deuce take it! I don't want to be drowned. The millions in the treasury there can wait. I shall change my batteries."

"Excuse me, sir," said the baroness, "but the rain will soon fall in torrents. You would do as well to go to the farm."

"I am quite ready to follow you, fair lady," replied Loquetières. "I will merely wish to speak to my servants a moment,"

Francesca remarked the antiquarian's eagerness to speak with his attendants. But, after all, it was natural that he should think of the poor fellows threatened with spending an inclement night out of doors, and she even thought that it would perhaps be better to offer them a shelter in the barn. "They would be better off under cover," she said eagerly. "And if you like, sir, to lodge them in the outhouses—"

"You are as good as you are beautiful," replied La Braise, enthusiastically. "I will tell the good lads that if they are worsted by the storm they can find a shelter at the farm."

He then hurriedly went down the winding staircase, and Francesca, who remained behind, had time to exchange a few words with her friends. "He's only a man going about to see sights," said she. "We need not be alarmed."

"He is too inquisitive," replied Pierre Moëse. "He questioned me as though he had been a naval commissioner. I mistrust him."

"So do I," said Jean Mornac, "and I shall keep a good lookout to-night."

"I approve of that, and I will watch at the farm while you are on the lookout here," remarked the baroness; "if anything occurs over there, I will send one of your brothers to let you know of it."

She now went down the spiral stairs which led from the platform to the base of the tower. When she reached the moat, the antiquarian was giving fresh instructions to his assistants. He had just informed them that in all probability the storm would prevent the boat from appearing, and that the whole matter would be deferred till the following night.

According to the weather they could camp out or come to the farm. The scamps asked nothing better than to leave their bivouac, and made no objection to their master's new plan.

"Well, my fair farmer," now said the sham archæologist, "I am at your orders. Will you deign to take my arm?"

"Thank you, sir," replied the baroness, modestly. "But I am only a peasant, and I don't take any one's arm."

"Oh!" exclaimed Loquetières, who did not scorn a little amusement. "you must have taken your happy bridegroom's arm on your wedding-day, for you are married, I presume?"

"I am a widow."

"Was your husband a farmer of this place?"

"No, sir, my husband was a Provençal, and I lived at Marseilles. I only returned to my native province a short time ago."

"Ah! I am not surprised then that you lack the heavy gait, and drawling speech of the Saintonge women. You have all the vivacity of the fair country of Provence. Where did you get those eyes? They would do honour to a Calabrian beauty."

"You are very flattering, sir," replied the Italian, whom these open compliments began to embarrass.

"Don't blush, my charming villager, I only say what is true, and the truth is no offence. Do you intend to stay at the farm?"

"As long as my masters will keep me."

This conversation was carried on along a narrow road that wound through deep excavations, below which the sea-water, which the heat of the sun would turn to salt, was drying. Loquetières, while allowing himself the pleasure of tormenting the baroness, looked about him, and felt more than ever convinced that the sea path was the only one by which the treasure could be removed. "Are we far from the farm?" he asked.

"Here we are," said Francesca, pointing to a large building shaded by elm-trees.

"You live quite near the keep, I see."

"Ten minutes' walk at the most. To-day it is fortunate that I haven't further to go, for the rain is beginning to fall."

The sky, indeed, had suddenly clouded over, the wind was blowing a gale, and thunder was heard in the distance. "Let us make haste," said the sham peasant woman, who was very desirous of ending the conversation.

Although the self-styled archaeologist pretended not to care for the storm, he did not wish to be drenched, and did not need urging to hurry on. A moment later the ill-assorted pair had reached the shelter of the farm. The door of the principal building was open, but the ground floor was unoccupied, and there was no one in the yard. Mornac's three remaining sons, who were not on guard at the tower that day, were working in the fields, and their father had gone to market at Marennes. The house was thus without protectors, just like the crops in the barns, but in the country round about the people were all honest, and lived as one lived in the Golden Age.

The solitude did not suit Francesca, however, for she did not care to be alone with her over-gallant companion. Still, she made up her mind to endure his society as best she could, thinking that the farmer or his sons would soon arrive. She showed the troublesome visitor the best bedrooms, and as soon as Loquetières had satisfied himself that they opened upon a staircase, leading straight to the garden, he declared that he would be delighted to occupy one of them. He was certain of being able to communicate with his servants by this staircase, and thought it useless to spend a bad night under the tent.

If the weather should clear, the treasure-hunter might slip out quietly, join his troop, and dig out the tons of gold. If, on the contrary, the sailor's prophecies were verified, and the storm burst forth and the sea rose, it would be infinitely better to spare himself the annoyance of camping-out, and to reserve his strength for the following night. Francesca also showed Loquetières a coach-house where his servants, mules and horse, could lodge at ease, and he did not refuse the offer to send for them as soon as the farmers returned.

The rain was now falling hard, the wind was blowing fiercely, and the old elms which shaded the house bent beneath the blast. It was evident that the night would be a terrible one, and that the boat would not arrive. The intended work must thus be delayed for twenty-four hours.

They returned to the ground floor where the exiled baroness spent her time, and where the Mornac family supped with her of an evening. Everything was exquisitely clean, and indicated easy circumstances. The

dressers were loaded with crockery and tinware, shining like silver-plate. The oaken table was polished like mahogany, and here and there were antique coffers, such as would nowadays fetch a high price, and which ought to have delighted a real antiquarian from Picardy. However, Loquetières, instead of admiring them, at once remarked a pack of cards lying upon a side-table; he remembered that Madame de Casanova was an experienced player, and it came into his head to torment her a little more. He was a facetious spy.

"What, my charming lady!" he exclaimed, "have you imported town amusements into this countrified place? Have you taught your cousins whist and *écarté*?"

"Oh, my good sir, I don't know those games," stammered the baroness, blushing up to her ears. "I sometimes play at patience, that's all."

"To know whether you will soon marry again?" said Fouché's pupil, with a tender smile.

He would have gone on in this style, but a sudden apparition put a stop to his compliments and gaiety alike.

A man had appeared at the door. He was dressed like a pedlar, and bent beneath the weight of an enormous pack. Although he was very well disguised, and had completely altered the appearance of his head and face, Loquetières recognised him at once. In fact, he was none other than the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier.

XXII.

THE chevalier, disguised as a pedlar, arrived amid a frightful storm, and the millions which he was in search of must indeed have been dear to his heart to induce him to brave such weather at his age. The rain had drenched him through; it had plastered his wig to his temples, and washed away the dye of liquorice-water with which he had smeared his face to darken his complexion. The ends of the red handkerchief tied under his cap, and intended to hide his cheeks, hung down like ducks' wings in a thunder-storm. In a word, his new disguise had greatly suffered from the weather, and could no longer deceive those who were acquainted with Octavie's father.

Loquetières was not deceived, and Saint-Hélier felt very disagreeably surprised on finding his travelling companion at the farm. He knew him at once, for Fouché's pupil had not changed his attire, and he deeply regretted not having been more expeditious. The enterprising chevalier had not, however, lost a single day; he had scarcely arrived at Rochefort, and reached the house of an old friend, when he had thrown off his disguise as a merchant, to assume that of a pedlar, and start for the farm.

He had merely taken time to organise, with his friend's assistance, a means of transport which he meant to employ to remove the treasure as soon as the trick upon which he relied had produced its effect. His friend, an old Chouan, whom he had known in London, had returned to France at the time of the Restoration, and now let out vehicles at Rochefort. He owned carts and horses, indeed, all kinds of rolling stock for transport, and was the kind of man to take a load from one end of France to the other. It was only necessary, then, to hand the barrels of gold over to him, and Saint-Hélier fondly hoped to accomplish this without resorting to force.

Saint-Hélier had but one trump card in his hand, but it was better than all Loquetières' stratagems. He knew the pass-word, and he had found out the right way of availing himself of his knowledge. The presence of his rival, who had preceded him on the field, annoyed him greatly, but it did not disconcert him, for he felt himself sure of being able to prevent any adverse measures. On his side, Loquetières was not greatly alarmed by the meeting. He felt sure that the chevalier did not recognise him, and as audacity and energy were needed to bring such an enterprise to a successful issue, he opined that Saint-Hélier would not conquer. The chevalier, even in his youth, had always been inclined to use mild measures, and besides, he had greatly declined of late years.

Fouché's pupil decided that he would watch him closely, for all that; and at the same moment Saint-Hélier resolved to keep an eye upon the man who had formerly wished to be his son-in-law, and even denounce him to the guardians of the treasure, for the illusions which he had first entertained had vanished, and he did not now believe that Loquetières had merely come to Saintonge to feel the public pulse. As for Francesca, who had no idea of what was going on, she was delighted by the arrival of the pedlar, for it put an end to an embarrassing *tête-à-tête*. Besides, her nature was compassionate, and she at once pitied the poor devil who thus made his appearance with the rain pouring off him in streams. Hastening towards him, she said in a kind tone: "Come in, my good man, come and rest yourself and dry your clothes."

Saint-Hélier hastily took advantage of the invitation. He crossed the hospitable threshold of the farm-house, and deposited his pack at the feet of the baroness. He had already looked at her attentively, and felt sure that she was the person whom he was in search of; the woman who had written to "Fabio," and who had given in her letter the phrase which the messenger from the Coral Pin Association must make use of in order to be recognised.

Since that great discovery in the Dark Room, Saint-Hélier had devoted himself to work analogous to that of the learned men, who reconstruct an antediluvian animal from the examination of a bone or tooth. By dint of reflecting, inquiring, and bringing names and facts to bear one upon another, he had succeeded in acquiring the certainty that Fabio was Fabien de Brouage, and that the anonymous correspondent of the viscount was an Italian woman who had made her escape from Paris, where she had been working for the Carbonari. Some information furnished by his friend, the Rochefort carter, had apprised him that a dark-complexioned cousin had lately come to live with the Mornacs, and her description answered to that of the vanished baroness. When he found himself in her presence, a single look sufficed to make him sure of her identity.

The situation was nevertheless trying: Loquetières was walking about at the other end of the room, pretending to examine the antique crockery and coffers as though he had been a good judge of such things, but his eye was watchful, his ear keen. It was necessary that the sham pedlar should let the sham peasant woman suppose that he had been sent by the Carbonari, and that without being detected by the spy. Saint-Hélier wondered whether the woman had intelligence enough to understand him quickly, and carry on the conversation as well as take the necessary precautions. While he was thus thinking and shaking himself like a dog after a swim, an idea which had not so far occurred to Francesca entered her mind. She thought that this old fellow, dressed as a pedlar, might, perhaps, be

the looked-for messenger. She could not question him before the troublesome antiquary, and, besides, according to the terms of the letter she had written, it was the secret messenger who ought to give the pass-word. The baroness and the chevalier were thus embarrassed to an equal degree, but a moment came when their eyes met, and the chevalier no longer hesitated, but said in a feeling tone, "Thanks, my good lady, thanks for letting me in." And he added: "It was not on my own account that I was afraid of remaining outside in the bad weather. I have been running about for thirty years, and I am used to storms. But I felt afraid on account of my merchandise. It is raining so hard that my wraps don't protect the things properly, and it would really be a pity if they were spoiled, for I have fine things in my pack. I have silk handkerchiefs and aprons and lace caps. You will buy something, won't you?"

"With pleasure," replied Francesca, "but you see, my friend, that I am in mourning. Your pretty things would be of no use to me, and unless you have some useful articles—"

"Oh, I have, my good lady. I have scissors, thimbles, and laces—"

He still looked at Francesca and she at him, and his eyes sparkled.

"Will you buy some pins? I have some of all kinds with coloured heads.

"Have you any with pink heads?" interrupted the baroness. "I wish to give one to a niece of my cousin Mornac. It is the fashion at Saint Trojan to use them to fasten caps with."

"Yes, I have pins with pink heads—pink coral—and blue and green glass besides. Will you look at them?"

"Not now, my good fellow. You must need rest, and we will keep you here till to-morrow morning. Take up your pack and come with me. I will take you to the loft. You will find it easy sleeping on the hay there, and I will send you some supper. Before you set out again to-morrow, you shall show me your trinkets."

"Ah! my good lady," exclaimed the pedlar, with delight, "I will give them to you for nothing if you like. Good heavens! I was afraid that I should have to sleep in the salt marshes. I shall be in paradise on a bed of hay, and with some supper to eat."

"Yes," thought Loquetières, who had not lost a word of this conversation, and who guessed all its meaning—"yes, congratulate yourself, you old trickster! You think you have already got the treasure because you have succeeded in taking in that Italian simpleton, but you are counting without the man who formerly did you the honour to court your daughter. We shall see to-night who will have the dowry."

Saint-Héliér by this time had put his pack upon his back again. "Excuse me for an instant, sir," said Francesca, addressing the archæologist. "I must take this poor man to the loft."

"Do not trouble about me, charming villager," graciously replied the sham antiquarian. "I will amuse myself with admiring this furniture, which seems as old as the keep itself."

Francesca made a sign to the pedlar to follow her, and went lightly up the stairs leading to the loft. As soon as Saint-Héliér had entered it, and his conductress had closed the door, his language and manner changed:

"Ah, madame!" he exclaimed, "how glad I am to have to deal with an intelligent woman like yourself. The presence of that man made me hesitate to give you the password. You knew how to put me on the way, and you did right."

"You have come from Fabien, then?" interrupted the baroness, who still hesitated to confide in the pedlar.

"From Fabien de Brouage, the most devoted of the brethren, whom I look upon as a son. I am his oldest friend—the one who received the letters that you wrote to the Rue de l'Eperon."

"What! you are his old teacher—the man who in London—"

"Yes, madame; he must have spoken to you about me."

"Oh, often. He told me that you loved liberty. He spoke of the persecutions to which you had been subjected since tyranny had exiled you from France, and that you had belonged to the Convention."

Saint-Hélier listened attentively to the enthusiastic discourse of the baroness, and turned it to account, for she was telling him things which he knew nothing about. He had not been aware that Francesca's correspondent had belonged to the Convention, and not having the appearance of a member of that body, it would never have entered his head to bring himself forward as a former colleague of Robespierre. Still, being obliged to assume a name in presenting himself at the farm, he had thought of taking that of Morlier, which he had found in the letter from the baroness to Fabien. Still this Morlier might be known to the baroness, and in that case the trick would fail. There was the same danger in assuming any other personality. Saint-Hélier had therefore resolved not to be too daring, but to feel his way and regulate his language according to that of the Italian woman.

If she had protested when he had spoken of the Rue de l'Eperon, he would have found some means of getting out of the difficulty, but Francesca had full faith in the falsehoods which he uttered, and so he persevered in them. He little thought that the man whom he pretended to be had travelled in the diligence with him, and had left Paris for the very purpose of coming to Brouage.

"Yes, madame," now said the ingenious chevalier, "I have suffered a great deal for our cause, and my services have led to my being chosen for an important and delicate mission, which I am now fulfilling. I will tell you what it is, and I must ask you to listen attentively, madame, for time is precious. You were, no doubt, surprised at not receiving any reply to your last letter. Fabien abstained from writing through prudence. We learned that there was a risk that letters might be unsealed by the clerks of the abominable Dark Room, and so we thought it better to confine ourselves to action alone. Besides, the observations which you addressed to our brother Fabien impressed the high committee. They concluded that our treasure would no longer be safe in this tower where inquisitive people constantly present themselves. Besides, the time has come for making use of the gold. A general revolt is in preparation. It will break out first at La Rochelle, where we have many friends. The regiment garrisoned there is devoted to us. It was therefore decided that I should leave for Rochefort, and come to an understanding with several of our brethren there, to procure means of transport, and that, with their help, I should cart the funds of the association to La Rochelle, where a delegate of the committee would be in waiting for them, to use them in accordance with the orders of the grandmaster. Everything is ready. Two carts each drawn by four strong horses, and driven by two of our brethren dressed as carters, are waiting for me, three miles from here, at the entrance of the salt marshes. They will be at the foot of the tower in an hour's time."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Francesca; "that would betray our secret.

The stranger whom you saw just now is an antiquarian, who has come here to examine the ruins. He has men and mules near the keep, and thinks of camping out there. We cannot do anything to-night. They would see us."

"What!" exclaimed the sham pedlar, "have you allowed these people to install themselves so close to the treasure?"

"I could not prevent them from doing so. The sandhills are free to all comers. But these people will not remain long. They will undoubtedly go away to-morrow or the day after. We need only defer the removal for two or three days."

"If we do, all will be lost. The scamp whom you have taken for an antiquarian is a spy sent by the Paris police. He is disguised, but I recognised him, and I feel certain that he came here to try to secure the treasure. He must be prevented from doing so, and we have not a moment to lose."

"What shall we do, good heavens! what shall we do?" exclaimed the baroness, in distress. "How can we deceive the men who are mounting guard round the château? There is a means, perhaps, but would it succeed?"

"Any means is good which would enable us to remove the treasure to-night."

"Well, this man has accepted the hospitality offered him here. He will sleep in Fabien's room. If I could persuade the people who are with him to take shelter in the barn, we should be rid of their spying till to-morrow. I already proposed to give them a lodging there, and my offer was not positively refused. The spy even said that if the weather became too bad, he would not leave his men in the tent. A sailor who is one of our friends and who is on the watch in the tower, has just assured me that the storm will be terrible, and he is never wrong in his predictions."

"Then all goes well, my dear sister. You must insist, and the scamp will consent, no doubt, to let the rascals under his command sleep in the barn, for I can guess his purpose. He wants to embark the gold on a boat which he has hired at Rochefort, for he was seen talking to the owner of a fishing-smack, near the port. But he will never dare to set sail in a tempest. He will put off the attempt till to-morrow night, and I can effect my purpose beforehand, as I mean to convey the gold by land, without troubling myself about wind or rain. Use all your eloquence to persuade the spy to bring his whole squad here."

"I will try to do so."

"When they are all in the barn, tell one of the farmers to see that they don't get out again."

"The master shall be locked up in Fabien's room, and his men in the coach-house."

"That would be the best plan. Now, one question more. The gold is in barrels, is it not?"

"Yes, there are twenty of them, each containing five hundred thousand francs."

"Ten millions in all," muttered the chevalier, whose mouth watered. "that is to say, six thousand pounds' weight. The two carts and the eight horses will not be any too many, but they can manage the matter. How long will it take to remove the barrels from the vault where they are buried and load them on the carts?"

"An hour at the most; Mornac's sons will all help you."

"Well, the two brethren disguised as carters will help them if necessary. To-morrow morning I shall be far from here with my precious load ! "

"But are you not afraid of being stopped on the road by the gendarmes and by the watchmen at the town gates? Wherever you go, are you not obliged to allow the authorities to examine your carts?"

"My friends and I have regular passports and a permit for merchandise. We shall avoid the town. We shall cross the Charente by the Soubise ferry, and reach La Rochelle by the road along the coast. It only passes some small villages."

"You must tell the farmer, Mornac the elder, all that you have just told me. He alone can instruct his sons what to do, and, besides, I shall not be with you. I must go back to this stranger. Mornac will soon be here. No doubt you have means of proving to him that the high *venta* has sent you."

"Certainly," replied the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier, with the utmost audacity. He relied upon his address and coolness to get him out of his difficulties, and he certainly had an unusual amount of daring by nature. He had deceived the baroness, so he hoped to be able to deceive a mere peasant of Saintonge.

"Very good," replied Francesca. "Rely upon me, sir; I will do all that I can to insure the success of your plans. You are right in saying that there is no time to lose. I will return to that miserable spy. As soon as I have his accomplices secure, I will let you know. I will send Mornac to you. Meantime, don't leave this loft. They must think you asleep. One word before we part. What are the orders of the leader of the Coral Pin brethren as concerns myself? Am I to remain here when the treasure has been removed?"

This question somewhat annoyed the chevalier, but did not altogether disconcert him. "The master will let you know his will," he replied gravely. "Circumstances did not allow him to decide as to the matter before I left. I will tell you, however, that my dear pupil, Fabien de Brouage, will bring you the orders that will put an end to your exile."

"That will be delightful. I shall see him again!" exclaimed the baroness. "But I must also ask you for news of a person who is very dear to me, and whose name you doubtless know. I don't know what has become of her, and if you could tell me without failing in your duty, I should be infinitely obliged to you."

This time Saint-Hélier's embarrassment was great. He had no idea what woman she referred to, and he would certainly have been unable to extricate himself from the difficult position in which he was now placed, had not a sound of wheels outside caused the baroness to turn to the window.

"That's Mornac. He has come back from market!" she exclaimed. "I must go down. I cannot leave him alone with that man. I will send him to you, and you must tell him how matters stand. Tell him the spy's projects and your own intentions. We shall see one another again to-night, I hope, and you will tell me all about my dear Cecilia."

Thereupon Francesca hurriedly went off, leaving the chevalier to his reflections. He did not attempt to detain her, as may readily be supposed. He deposited his pack in a corner, and seated himself upon a bundle of hay to meditate upon his coming interview with the farmer, and prepare to deceive him as he hoped to do.

Meantime, the Italian woman had reached the bottom of the stairs, where

she met old Mornac, who was going after her, followed by the stranger, whom, to his great surprise, he had found under his roof.

Loquetières was very fluent, and he had already introduced himself to the farmer who had listened to him with some mistrust, when he spoke of the reason of his trip, and his plan of studying the ruins of the château.

"Cousin," said the sham peasant woman to old Mornac, "I see that this gentleman has told you why he has come to our part of the country, and I am sure that you don't want him to sleep outside. Thank Heaven! there is room for everybody, and you will find a poor pedlar upstairs, whom I have lodged in the loft. Would you believe it, the poor man wouldn't remain without your permission?"

"I will go to him," said old Mornac quickly, for he understood the meaning of the glance which the baroness gave him. "The lads have come in from the fields. They don't need me to unharness the horse and take him to the stable, or to put the cart under shelter."

While he was turning away, Francesca looked outside and saw that the three young fellows, who were not on watch at the keep, had arrived almost at the same time as their father, and were busy attending to the vehicle.

"Fair villager," said Loquetières, smiling, "the head of your family is, I see, as charitable as yourself, and I should truly reproach myself if I did not, on behalf of my men, profit by the hospitality you so kindly offer. I will, therefore, with your permission, tell them myself that I authorize them to sleep here. It would be cruelty to condemn them to remain outside on such a night. The tempest would sweep them away, and my tent and the mules with them. The wind is now twice as strong as it was, but it is not raining so hard, and I will take advantage of the respite."

Francesca was surprised to find the spy disposed to do precisely what she was about to request. She concluded that he had no inkling of what was going on, and that the pedlar's coming had not excited his suspicions. In this she was completely deceived, as Loquetières had not only recognised Saint-Héliér, but had fully understood the words exchanged between the pedlar and the peasant with regard to the trinkets in his pack; he had even decided to alter his plans in consequence. The baroness let him go; she saw him open the enormous umbrella with which he protected himself from rain and sun, and then cross the yard with a bow to the Mornac lads, who looked at him in amazement as he strode away.

Fouché's pupil might have lost his way in the paths winding round the salt marshes, for night was beginning to follow twilight; but the tower rose up against the dark sky, and all that he had to do was to keep it in sight. The gale of wind that was blowing in his face soon forced him to close his umbrella, and delayed him somewhat in his walk, but he held out. He had often experienced worse weather.

It required but a quarter of an hour for him to reach the moat, where he found his assistants busy putting up the tent. They were not very expert in the work, and the storm gave them great trouble. The leader of the party immediately came towards his employer, and said to him: "Master, there is something fresh going on. The two men whom you met up there, upon the platform, are still in the tower, and it looks as though they were going to stay there all night."

"I thought so," quietly replied Loquetières.

"That is not all, sir. Just now, in going over the sandhills to see whether we should have a long spell of bad weather or not, I saw an individual dressed like a carter, who was creeping stealthily along past the dyke, and

seemed to be hiding. The idea entered my mind to watch him, and I laid down flat in the sand. He came within a hundred paces of the moat where we now are. But he stopped when he heard the noise that the men were making in putting up the tent, he listened for two or three minutes and then turned back. I followed him."

"You did right. Did he see you?"

"No, I took care of that. Besides, he did not suspect anything. He did not once turn round."

"Where was he going?"

"Ah! sir, that is the strange part of it. He went to join another man dressed like himself, who was waiting for him in a ravine, taking care of two large carts, each drawn by four strong horses. They were empty, sir, and they haven't come here for nothing. I would wager my life that those carters have an understanding with the farmers, and that the removal of the gold will be effected to-night. I am afraid that we have come a day too late."

"It may be," muttered Loquetières, and after a few moments' thought, he added: "Is there a place near the spot where the carts are standing, where you could hide with your men?"

"Yes, for the road is edged on either side by sand hills. But the mules would be in my way."

"You can leave them here. I came for you to take you to the farm. But my plans are changed. Your men have finished putting up the tent, have they not?"

"Yes, master, and the animals are all tied up."

"Good! now this is what you have to do. Listen attentively to me and don't try to understand, but act. I am about to return to the house where the peasant woman insists upon lodging us, I now guess why. I shall tell this intriguing woman, whose peasant's attire is a mere disguise, that you want to go to the inn in the village over there, to sleep, and that I have let you do so in order not to trouble her, and to enable you to refresh yourselves. Then, when I leave you, you must all, one after another, hide in some spot near the carts. Don't stir till I come to you, unless the carts are moved. If the carters, as I think probable, take the vehicles to the foot of the tower, you must follow them at a distance, but be careful not to let yourselves be seen. Go by way of the beach, if possible. I will join you at midnight, precisely. Above all, make sure that the two scamps who are mounting guard in the tower don't see you leave here."

"It won't be easy. I think that they are watching us up there, or from some air-hole in the vaults."

"You are right. It would be best to do the thing openly. Call your comrades together, and all four of you, follow me. The watchmen in the tower will think that I am taking you to the farm. That is what I want them to think. When we are a couple of hundred paces hence, they won't be able to see us any longer. Then you must leave me and go round to find the carts."

"That is the best way, master. Be easy, I understand what you wish, and all will go well."

The work of putting up the tent was now completed. The mules and the sorrel marc were eating their fodder. Their drivers willingly left them behind, to follow Loquetières and his chief assistant, who had told them something of the new condition of affairs. They soon parted. The men turned to the left, and their leader returned to Mornac's house.

As he entered the yard, he saw the peasant woman waiting at the door of the already lighted room, where the evening meal was being prepared, and raising his head he perceived that there was light in the loft where the pedlar had been sent to sleep.

"So I am to sup with the dear baroness," he muttered to himself, "and then Papa Saint-Hélier, we will see between us which will prove the smarter of the two."

Loquetières, as he re-entered the room, found Mornac, three of his sons, and his handsome cousin. The fourth son, it was evident, must still be at the tower. The family welcomed the guest, who was now about to "take his seat at their hearth"—as the writers of the day then phrased it—with more politeness than true cordiality. The good people now knew that the sham antiquarian was, in point of fact, nothing but a spy. Saint-Hélier had denounced the man whom he had once thought of receiving into his family, and the detective was in a position to play the same trick on the chevalier. But he took good care not to do so, having quite another plan in his head.

Saint-Hélier had managed matters so cleverly in talking with old Mornac that all the people at the farm took him for an envoy of the high *venta*, and were ready to hand the treasure over to him. But, on the other hand, they all secretly cursed the detective who had presented himself under a false name, with evil designs upon the millions belonging to the Carbonari. Loquetières was not uneasy, for he felt sure that his friend, the chevalier, had not recognized him; but the manner of the Mornacs led him to suppose that a deal had been said concerning him during his short absence, and that they all were anxious to know whether he and his men would sleep at the farm or not. He thought fit to anticipate their questions, and remarked:

"Just fancy, my servants are not willing to take advantage of your offer of a shelter. Oh! don't be annoyed," he added, seeing the baroness turn pale and old Mornac frown, "the scamps won't be inconvenienced by the rain. They did not wish to remain near the moat, and I had no trouble in getting them away. But I told them that they might go to the inn in the village through which we passed, they think the wine so good there that they asked me to allow them to take supper and sleep there. Can you imagine their preferring a tavern to a respectable house? Unfortunately, all the Picards are like that. They think of nothing but drinking. I am too easy a master. However, I told them that they might do as they pleased."

"The nearest village is Saint-Froult," said the farmer. "There is also Moëse."

"I don't know, upon my word, what place they wish to go to, and I didn't think to ask them. I shall be satisfied if they return to their posts by daylight, for I wish to set to work early in the morning if possible."

"Did they take your mules and luggage with them?"

"No. You remind me that I was careless, perhaps, in leaving my traps free to be pounced upon by passers-by—my books especially—and my portfolios, in which there are several very interesting drawings."

The old peasant's face cleared. "Don't be alarmed, sir, robbers are unknown about here," said he. "Besides, to make all the more sure, one of my sons shall sleep in your tent."

"Heaven forbid that I should ask him to do anything so unpleasant!"

"Oh! he is used to passing his nights in the salt marshes. He likes a tent better than a house. He went that way to work, and hasn't yet come

in. One of his brothers will go to him, and bring your animals to the farm stables."

"You are as hospitable as a patriarch. I am ashamed to accept, but I should seem ungrateful in refusing. I hope, besides, that I shall have an opportunity of making some return."

"It is unnecessary, sir: it is our custom to receive the travellers who visit the château. So let us say no more, but take supper."

"Willingly. The sea air has given me an appetite."

The soup, brought in by a robust servant-girl, was now smoking upon the table. Fouché's pupil seated himself between the farmer and the latter's pretended cousin. Two of the young Mornacs took places beside the baroness. The third, at a sign from the head of the house, had gone to the keep to warn his brother of what was going on at the farm, and to find the mules.

The repast was gay, as everyone present had reason to be satisfied. The baroness was delighted at the thought that her exile was about to come to an end. The father and sons were delighted at the thought that they would succeed in shutting the spy up in his room, and his mules in the stable, and that, thanks to these precautions, they would be able to remove the treasure in safety.

As for Loquetières, he was overjoyed, for all was going as he wished. He displayed all the resources of his fertile mind at supper, and although he did not succeed in convincing his hosts that he had come to study historical buildings, he made them think that his immediate intentions were not hostile. When they left the table, the baroness and the Mornacs felt convinced that the spy had no thought of taking advantage of the darkness to remove the barrels of gold that night. And as the man whom they took for an envoy of the Carbonari was to remove them before dawn, they made sure that in a few hours' time they would have nothing further to fear from the spy.

While the supper was proceeding, the mules and the mare arrived at the farm, led by the youngest of the lads, who immediately turned the key of the stable-door upon them.

Loquetières wished to reassure his hosts completely. So, after having, for form's sake, paid a few compliments to the fair peasant, he admitted that his journey had greatly fatigued him, and that he would be glad to retire as soon as possible. Everyone was eager to show him his room. Francesca and old Mornac accompanied him to the apartment of Fabien de Brouage, which was in readiness. It communicated with a long passage, which ran from one end of the house to the other; and there were but two exits to the house itself, one leading to the yard, and the other to the garden. It was only necessary to close them to prevent Loquetières escaping.

He was not of an age, nor had he the vigour necessary to make away by the window, so it was not to be feared that he could escape, and, in fact, he had no thought of doing so, as he had quite another trick to play.

When the old peasant and the baroness had wished him good-night, and left him alone, he opened the door a little, put his head outside, and listened till the sounds of their footsteps ceased. He distinctly heard them go down stairs, and gave them time to reach the lower floor. But scarcely had they done so than he made ready to take advantage of their absence. He began by placing the lamp which had been given him near the window. He then produced a dark lantern of very small size, which he had concealed about his person, and lighted it. Finally, provided with this burglar's

apparatus, he slipped from the room, which he locked, putting the key in his pocket, so as to make sure that no one would enter the room in his absence to find out whether he was still there or not. Fouché's pupil was an adept in guessing the internal construction of a house. It sufficed for him to see a light in a garret to know where the garret was, and how to reach it. He did not miss his way, and at once found the steps which led to the upper storey, under the roof. Here he found the loft full of hay, and he saw a faint light, which showed that the sham pedlar was there. Loquetières was looking for him, and if he had been new to his trade, he would have gone straight up to him, but he took good care to do nothing of the kind. He guessed that the pretended envoy of the Coral Pin Association would receive a visit from the baroness, and perhaps from the farmer also, so he prudently closed his dark lantern, and noiselessly slipped in among the bundles of hay, which were carelessly piled up, or laid loosely upon the floor. As he was very agile, he soon succeeded in finding a hiding-place, in which he installed himself, having sufficient air, and being able to see and hear what went on without his presence being suspected. He perceived that the father of the incomparable Octavie was seated on his pack, supping mournfully off a crust, a scrap of cheese, and a glass of wine.

The elegant chevalier was greatly changed by the fatigue and anxieties of his journey. Loquetières, who thought him badly disguised, also considered him somewhat ridiculous, and besides, he was quite sure that he should have no trouble in frustrating his purpose. He had not been examining him for more than five minutes when a heavy step was heard. Old Mornac appeared, and Saint-Héliér rose as he entered.

"All is going well," said the peasant. "That scamp is abed, and I'll warrant that he won't get out of the house this night. His horse and his six mules are in the stable. The scoundrels he had with him have gone to find a tavern a mile and a half away. They won't be back till to-morrow morning, so we have all the time we need, and this is what I propose: One of my sons has just been talking to the two carters. It is agreed that they shall come up to the foot of the tower. The removal will be all the easier."

"But what if those rascals should take it into their heads to return while the loading is going on?" objected the sham pedlar.

"In that case," quietly replied Mornac, "my sons and I will wring their necks and bury them where the barrels are now hidden. You know that in my opinion we ought to have begun by exterminating that miserable spy; but I gave way to the reasons you advanced for not doing so."

Loquetières felt a chill run over him at these words, and admitted that the chevalier's inspirations might sometimes be of value.

"Yes," said Saint-Héliér, "my instructions are to avoid violence."

"Well, we won't have recourse to it unless we are obliged. I was telling you that the carts would come up to the tower; but they will only come one after another. It is as well that the approaches on the side of Saint-Froult should be guarded by at least one of your men, for it's there that those villains have gone to carouse. Now I came to tell you that you have nearly an hour to yourself. It isn't necessary that you should be present while we are digging up the soil in the tower. It is enough for you to come and count the barrels and see them put in the carts. I am going away with my sons now. Madame Francesca will be alone in the house, and will not leave her room. That spy mustn't hear us move about. You won't see Francesca again. She begs you to tell the master of the Coral

Pin Brotherhood that she wishes to return to Paris, and that if this is impossible, she wishes to join her dearest friend. Can you remember all that?"

"Perfectly, and I will deliver the message on the day of my arrival."

"That is all that I have to tell you. Here is the key of the door leading into the garden. Have you a watch?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, when it's ten o'clock go down the stairs which I showed you. You have a lamp. So you run no risk of losing your way. I should advise you, however, not to make any noise in walking about. When you are downstairs, open the door as quietly as possible. My youngest son will be waiting for you in the garden to take you to the tower. You wouldn't be able to reach the place without a guide, for the road through the marshes is a bad one. I have said all there is to say, and now I must leave you. We will have a talk on the road which you must follow to reach La Rochelle. Take this key. I will see you in an hour."

Saint-Hélier took the key and Mornac left the loft. Loquetières waited five minutes to allow the farmer time to get away, and the worthy chevalier a chance to collect himself. Then, when he saw him once more seated upon his pack, looking at his watch, he cautiously popped his head above the piles of hay, and in his mildest voice he called out: "Good evening, my dear Saint-Hélier."

At these words, which seemed to come from the midst of a bundle of hay, Octavie's father sprang to his feet. The trumpet on judgment day could hardly have astonished him more than this voice calling him by name in the loft of a farm where everybody believed him to be a pedlar.

He was still more amazed when he saw the person who had travelled with him in the coach stand before him. Loquetières, who, under his black moustache, was enjoying a quiet laugh, quietly added: "Don't be alarmed, my dear chevalier. It is I."

"Who are you?" asked Saint-Hélier, in a trembling voice.

"Loquetières. Confess that you would never have known me if I hadn't told you my name! You have lost a good deal of your old cunning, my friend, a good deal. That comes from not keeping your hand in. You disguise yourself badly and get taken in by other people's disguises."

"You are mistaken," said the chevalier, whose self-esteem was wounded.

"I knew perfectly well who you were. I recognised you between Chartres and Vendôme. But I cannot imagine what you want with me."

"Really, now? Not the least little bit?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Well, then, I will tell you. I want my share of the millions."

"Of what millions?"

"Oh, don't pretend that you don't know. I have heard all that you were saying to the farmer. You must confess that I've got you fast now."

Saint-Hélier hung his head, and found not a word to say, such was his consternation.

"Do you know, my dear fellow, that though you haven't all your by-gone wisdom, you are still good at plotting. To find out the pass-word of the Carbonari, and profit by the discovery to make them deliver their treasures up to you, that isn't an easy matter, let me say! It is true that your post as director of the Dark Room must have stood you in good stead, to penetrate the secrets of the conspirators."

"You also have found them out, it seems."

"That is precisely why I have the right to be your partner now."

"Never!"

"Would you prefer my denouncing you to the public prosecutor at Rochefort?"

"Would you do that?"

"To-morrow, my dear friend."

"But you would ruin yourself, for I should denounce you."

"You would? If you were mad enough to complain to the authorities, you would bitterly repent it. It would be clear that you had abused your position to rob the government that pays you, while I should have no trouble in proving that I am working in behalf of that government. I am not in a public position; I am a police agent, and as such I have a right, in fact, it is my duty, to seize upon the gold of the conspirators."

The poor chevalier realised all the justice of this reasoning, and he hung his head, muttering: "Loquetières, you are doing a very bad deed."

"Oh, no! It is quite natural, on the contrary. We each of us have a hand in a good job. So it is right that we should share the profits. Observe, if you please, that I might take everything, for I defy you to get hold of the treasure unless I allow you to do so. Between ourselves, your invention of the carts with false carters is a stupid one, and you couldn't go far with your load without being stopped."

"What, do you know—"

"I have just told you that I didn't lose a word of what you said to Mornac. I tell you that you cannot do without me."

"Nor you without me."

"I might say a good deal as to that, but I will admit it. That does not prevent my having the means for embarking the barrels of gold, this very night, while you are reduced to running the risks of a long journey by road."

"You have a vessel at your disposal, then?"

"Yes, my dear friend, a smack which is waiting for me, near enough to enable us to reach it before daylight, and far enough away to keep the Carbonari from seeing us load it—a vessel on which you can embark with me, and which will take us direct to England. That is better than your carts."

"If I thought that—"

"Believe it or not, as you please, but if you like you shall see it. However, make up your mind to act with me, and do so at once, and act as I tell you, or if not, I won't answer for your life or for mine either; for, rather than renounce my share, I shall tell the farmers why we are both here; and if you force me to that extremity, I believe that the Mornacs would kill us both."

"What do you require of me?"

"Nothing but what is very simple and easy. In the first place, you must come with me down the stairs leading to the garden, and at once, as young Mornac is coming for you at ten precisely, to take you to the tower, and it is already past nine. I don't want to meet any of these Mornacs at the door, for they think that they have shut me up till daylight. You must open the door of which you have the key; as soon as I am outside you must shut it again, return to your garret, and not trouble yourself about me afterwards. You will find me at midnight on the road, not far from the dyke, and I will take care of all the rest. Are you ready?"

"Yes, since it must be so," muttered Saint-Helier.

"Come, then," said the spy.

The chevalier took his lamp and went down, though not without a sigh, into the hall. He was followed by the triumphant Loquetières, who congratulated himself more and more on the course which he was pursuing. He would certainly have preferred to keep all the treasure for himself; but he saw that this was impossible, and half of the gold constituted a sufficiently large share for him to reconcile himself to the altered situation of affairs. At the foot of the stairs, while the chevalier was, much against his will, putting the key into the lock, he urged him not to consent, upon any pretext, to allow himself to be escorted by the farmers, when the carts were loaded; and the chevalier, in good faith, made this promise, for he did not care to remain within reach of these formidable countrymen.

As soon as Fouché's pupil had set foot in the garden, he started off, and as he had a special talent for finding his way, he succeeded, in spite of the darkness, in reaching the road through the marsh. The weather was frightful; the sea, which was rising rapidly, was moaning ominously, and it became more and more evident that the boat moored at the Ile de Madame would not come to the place of assignation near the keep. This is why Loquetières had determined to proceed to its moorings. He calculated that the storm would last all night, that at dawn the sea would recede, and that the carts would then be able to cross the strip of sand which separates the Ile de Madame from *terra-firma*, and which is called the Oxen's Ford. From the keep to the cape in front of this island there was a distance of only six miles. However slowly the carts might move, bringing the treasure, they would certainly reach the cape before sunrise.

All went at first as the spy had hoped. He found his four assistants among the reeds at the foot of the dyke, and he hid himself with them. Then a hard trial began. The rain fell in torrents, and the sham anti-quarian, who was not very warmly clad, and who had the prospect of two or three hours' waiting before him, was forced to console himself for being wet to the skin by thinking of the millions which the Mornacs were now digging up for his benefit. Loquetières cared nothing for his luggage and his mules. He willingly relinquished them for the benefit of the simple-minded peasants who were unknowingly about to enrich him.

He soon had the great satisfaction of hearing the carts move on, and return one after another to the dyke, where they had remained since sunset. Midnight was striking by the clock of Saint-Froult church, when a small group of men appeared accompanying the last load of gold. Although the night was somewhat dark, this group, seen from below, stood out clearly defined against the sky, so that Loquetières could distinguish the chevalier, still disguised as a pedlar and carrying his pack upon his back. He felt keen emotion at the sight. It was now necessary to find out whether the Mornacs would leave the spurious envoy of the Carbonari, or whether, by any evil chance, they had made up their minds to escort him. In this case, the spy's plans would fall through. However, he had the ineffable satisfaction of seeing them abandon Saint-Hélier after an affectionate farewell, and turn back towards the farm.

While they were going off, the carts rolled along and were soon lost to view in the darkness.

This was the moment that Loquetières had waited for. He softly called his assistants, who began running along with him, following the lower side of the dyke. When they had caught up with the carts, they were within three hundred paces of the houses of Saint-Froult.

M. de Saint-Hélier felt greatly afraid, when he suddenly saw five men appear, as though they had sprung up out of the earth. But Loquetières soon made himself known. "Well," said he, "are the twenty barrels here?"

"Yes," replied Octavie's father, "and they are so heavy that these eight horses have great trouble in dragging them along."

"We shall manage it, you may be sure. The two carters whom you have hired must know the road to the cape south of the mouth of the Charente. Take me to them, and let me instruct them."

"The men whom you see here are mine," added Loquetières, perceiving that the chevalier was looking uneasily at his assistants.

The poor chevalier's mind was greatly agitated, and he allowed himself to be led along like a lamb. A brief colloquy enabled the false carters to understand the situation. They were devoted to Saint-Hélier, and made no difficulty about obeying a man whom he presented as his friend. They declared that they could reach the cape before three o'clock by following some roads where they should certainly not meet anyone in such dreadful weather. They also declared that the passage from the cape to the island was quite practicable when the tide was low, even with heavily laden vehicles. Still they confessed that they were not very well acquainted with the hours of the tide. On this point Loquetières thought himself able to inform them. They set out, and the leader of the expedition followed a very sensible order of march. He sent two of his men ahead as scouts, and detached two others as a rear-guard. He then remained in the central group with his partner. He was too anxious to indulge in much talking, and the chevalier, stunned by the rapid succession of events, was little disposed to carry on a conversation.

The journey was made in silence until the end of it was almost reached. When the carters announced, after a march of two hours and a half, that in ten minutes more they would reach the cape, Octavie's father said, dejectedly: "We are going to England, then?"

"Yes, my dear friend," replied Loquetières, "and I long to be there. You have not any intention, I presume, of carting these millions to your house on the Place Royale?"

"No; I had another plan, and I confess that the idea of getting into a fishing-smack for so long a voyage somewhat alarms me, the more as my two assistants cannot go with me. Are you sure of the honesty of your own men?"

"As sure as I am of my own. You really torment yourself for very petty reasons. You are not very much to be pitied for going to London before returning to Paris. If you feel too dull there, your daughter can join you."

This was said in a peculiar tone. The chevalier understood that Loquetières no longer thought of marrying Octavie, any more than he did of accepting him as a son-in-law; and this put him more at ease.

They had at last reached the cape. The daylight was beginning to dawn. The storm had begun to subside, and the sea no longer beat against the shore. It had greatly receded, but it was not yet light enough to see how far it had gone back.

Loquetières made up his mind to halt before crossing the sands. It was necessary to find out whether the cutter was still at anchor off the Ile de Madame. His pockets were full of articles, which might be requisite in the hazardous expedition which he had undertaken, and he produced a small

telescope and was about to use it when his friend, Saint-Hélier, caught hold of his arm, and said: "Listen! it seems to me that I hear the galloping of a horse."

Loquetières listened, but could detect no sound whatever. "My dear friend," said he, "fear makes you hear amiss. You take the noise of the sea for the galloping of a horse, and imagine that a squadron of cavalry is at our heels. Where could it come from? The Mornacs only have some farm-horses and my mules. Besides, they think you are a conspirator like themselves, and will never dream of pursuing you, for the honest creatures are almost as glad to be rid of the treasure as you are to carry it off. So quiet yourself, and let me examine the pass."

Saint-Hélier said no more. The noise which he had heard had ceased, and he began to think that he had been mistaken. Besides, he was so completely under the influence of Loquetières, that he left the care of directing matters entirely to him.

Fouché's pupil, telescope in hand, was now carefully examining the shore. The carts and the men had stopped at the extreme point of the strip of land jutting out into the sea near the mouth of the Charente. By the pale light of early morn the low hills on the right bank of the river were just visible, and the Ile de Madame was to be distinguished looking like a great black streak between the grey waters. At the foot of the sandy bank upon which the carts were stationed, there extended a flat strand, still damp with the retreating tide. This strand sloped gently down to the middle of the channel which separated the continent from the island where the fugitives hoped to find the boat chartered by Loquetières. The width of this channel was not more than twelve hundred yards, and although the sea had greatly receded, it was not yet quite dry.

But the great question was to know whether the vessel was in its place. To his great delight Loquetières caught sight of it, and to his astonishment he saw that instead of being near the southern curve of the island, it was in the channel with its sails spread. This part of the channel was full of water receding rapidly.

The owner of the vessel understood the situation. He had not been tempted to brave the tempest when at its height, but he had not cared to remain at anchor. The sea having gone out and the wind having fallen, he had tacked and entered the pass, so as to be free in his movements. This manœuvre enabled him to keep near the coast or go out into the open, as he chose. He would now, however, be obliged to take the last course under penalty of touching bottom and running upon a sand bank, for there was little water left. With a wisdom that would have done honour to an old tar, Fouché's pupil saw at once the great advantage thus secured by the skill and foresight of the boat's master. It was only necessary to cross the dry part of the strand with the carts, to take them into the sea as far as they could go without the horses losing their footing, to hail the captain and tell him to send a boat to fetch the barrels of gold. Four or five journeys would suffice to remove them all, and place them on board the vessel. But in order to succeed it was necessary for the vessel and its boat to remain afloat safely, and the water was now running out. It was also necessary—when men and barrels were aboard—that the smack with Loquetières, Saint-Hélier and their fortune should be able to take advantage of the tide, and sail out into the open sea. So the plunderers had not a moment to lose.

"Let us start, my lads!" exclaimed Loquetières. "Touch up your horses, and you, my men, push on the wheels if the horses can't pull fast

enough. We must get our gold into a safe place. The smack which is to take us to England is waiting. I just saw its yellow flag. That is the signal agreed upon. Saint-Hélier, have you a yellow silk handkerchief in your pack?"

"Yes," replied the chevalier, more and more subjugated by his friend's energy and decision.

"Well then, undo the bundle at once. Take out the handkerchief, and we will run it up on the shore to reply to the signal."

The director of the Dark Room immediately obeyed. His pack lay in one of the carts. He opened it and pulled out several handkerchiefs, from which he quickly selected one of the desired colour.

"Now," said the spy, "make haste and follow me."

The partners now began to run across the strand as fast as they could go, while the sham carters and the men from Paris brought on the carts. The water was only three hundred yards away.

Loquetières was the first to reach it, and he plunged bravely into the water up to his knees, waving the improvised flag in his hand.

The sky was gradually clearing, and by the pale light of dawn, the smack tacking about in the middle of the channel and the sailors aboard it were distinctly visible. The signal was immediately seen and understood. The man at the helm made the smack lie to; the captain threw out a grapnel to prevent it from drifting, and leaped with three of his sailors into a boat. At the same time the carts, urged ahead, reached the margin of the water. At this cheering sight Loquetières could not restrain the expression of his delight. "Well, well! Papa Saint-Hélier!" said he, slapping Octavie's father upon the shoulder, "do you now regret making a treaty with me? Neither of us could do anything alone. But by helping one another, here we are! It is the story of the blind man and the cripple all over again. You see that the cutter is coming towards us. The shore is deserted, so is the coast. We have been lucky enough not to meet any custom-house men. They might see us now, but would not meddle with us. They are here to prevent the landing of merchandise, but we are going to do the reverse. So, my old accomplice, the treasure is ours. The Mornacs will be nicely taken in when they come to wish me good-morning in my room and find it empty."

"It still seems to me as though I heard the galloping of a horse."

"Again! You are incorrigible, my dear friend."

"No, I am not mistaken. Listen!"

Loquetières did so, and his brow darkened for a moment. He thought that he also heard some suspicious sounds. But he soon shook off his apprehensions. "It is the wind," said he, "or the waves, or the thunder which is still muttering afar off."

"True. I do not hear anything now, perhaps because the persons pursuing us are at one of the turns of the coast."

"Let me alone with your turns, and let us make haste to get our load aboard! Come, comrades, get into the first cart and unload a barrel. You can carry it to the boat if four take hold together. Don't be afraid of getting wet; you shall all have something to dry yourselves with."

"Is everything right?" called out the captain, who was rowing the boat.

"Yes, come this way!"

"We can't, we should run aground. We haven't more than a foot of water below us, and the sea is going out fast. You must come to us. There's no danger, even if the horses are breast high in the water."

"Yes, but if the men are in up to the neck they won't be able to carry anything."

"And I don't know how to swim," said Saint-Hélier, piteously.

"Get into the cart," called out Loquetières, "get in, as you are not fit for anything better."

The chevalier climbed in, helping himself as well as he could by the felly of the wheels, and catching on by the side of the vehicle. Meantime the carters drew the horses along by the bridle, and brought them somewhat further into the water. The action of a very violent current was now perceptible, a current bearing towards the mouth of the Charente, and it was evident that the removal of the gold would be more difficult than had seemed at first. The boat was being carried away in spite of the efforts of the sailors to keep it within reach of the men at work without touching the bottom. And at this critical moment, when the goal they aimed at was so near, the fortunes of the partners underwent a disastrous change.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Saint-Hélier, "see! we are pursued! we are lost!"

Loquetières turned round and became ghastly pale as he caught sight of a group of riders just reaching the strand. There were six of them, and one, who seemed to be ordering the others, galloped ahead, mounted upon a sorrel mare, which the spy recognised at once. "The farmer and his men!" he exclaimed.

"The man at the head does not come from the farm," said one of the assistants.

"Whether he comes from the farm or from the devil, I hope that we are not going to let ourselves be taken. Make haste, my friends, make haste! They dare not pursue us into the water, or if they do, we will drown them. There are but six of them, and we are eight without counting the sailors, who will help us."

Loquetières greatly deceived himself. The captain of the vessel already saw that the attempt was a failure, and not caring to take part in a useless battle, he ordered the men in the boat to put about. However, the carters and the other assistants obeyed their master's directions, and the horses drew on the carts, which were already in the water up to the axles. But the riders had crossed the strand in the twinkling of an eye. They swept down like an avalanche, right into the water, without pausing for an instant.

Mornac and his four sons were with the party, and Saint-Hélier and Loquetières now recognized the man upon the sorrel horse. It was the third traveller in the coach, the old man whom they had taken for a peaceful professor of mathematics. It was Lormier, the ex-member of the Convention, the true messenger of the high *venta*, who, having lost a day at Rochefort in order to ascertain why Mademoiselle de Brouage had gone there, had only reached the farm two hours after the treasure had been taken away. There had been a stormy scene between him and the farmers, who refused to admit that he was the real messenger; but he brought a letter to the baroness from the Grand Master of the Coral Pin Association, and the Mornacs, furious at having been deceived by the false pedlar, had started in all haste with Lormier in pursuit of the plunderers. The ruts made by the vehicles had guided them, and they had arrived in time.

The Mornacs were only provided with their sticks, but Lormier had pistols and the whole party was about to charge the robbers when the two carts suddenly disappeared under the water.

The horses, being urged ahead too quickly, had fallen into a profound

cavity which the current had formed in the sand of the Oxen's Ford, and the carts had been engulfed. The barrels of gold and the poor Chevalier de Saint-Hélier sank to the bottom and did not reappear.

Three of the assistants lost their footing and were drowned. The fourth, the two carters, and Loquetières, who valued their lives even without the millions, began to swim towards the boat. But it was written that Fouché's pupil, more fortunate than his master, should die on a detective's field of honour in the very midst of a secret expedition. Lormier had recognised the spy. He took one of his pistols from his belt, aimed at Loquetières, fired, and sent a bullet between his shoulders. He scorned to fire at the assistants, who were rescued by the sailors in the boat, and without evincing any emotion he watched the smack set sail for the entrance of the pass, double the cape and disappear.

He knew that the tide was running out and that the barrels of gold would soon be seen lying on the sand. He meant to take them back to the farm with the help of the Mornacs' horses and his own; but he had not thought of the coastguards. A dozen of the latter, sheltered hard by in a cabin, had witnessed the scene and now came up fully armed. The game was not equal. Lormier saw that the gold was lost, and that by attempting to fight for it with the government agents, he would only compromise the Coral Pin Association. He galloped back towards the farm. The Mornacs followed him, and the custom-house officers did not pursue them. At sunrise these worthy fellows came upon a find, of which they received a full share later on, for the gold of the Carbonari went to swell the royal treasury.

The newspapers of the time were forbidden to speak of the affair. They were silent also as to the death of Loquetières, but they related that the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier had been drowned while bathing at a Saintonge watering-place, and thus all Paris learned that the beautiful Octavie was now an orphan.

XXIII.

WHILE the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier and Loquetières were thus meeting with a tragic death in the waters of the Oxen's Ford, other dramas were being enacted in Paris. These were dramas of private life, stirring enough, although not such spectacular affairs as the one played upon the Saintonge shore.

General de Brouage, Viscount Fabien, Cecilia d'Ascoli, and Octavie de Saint-Hélier had for several days been living in expectation of a final crisis. There had been a pause, so to speak, in their experiences after the performance at the Panorama-Dramatique, and especially after the departure of the two gold-hunters from Paris.

The general was brooding in solitude over his anger and grief, cursing his daughter, weeping for his son, and regretting that he had granted the detective a ten days' delay to arrest Count Henri's murderer. He thought, moreover, often of the beautiful creature whom he had seen but twice, but whom he vowed to behold again. Fabien, almost wild with impatience, harbouring both love and hatred in his heart, was anxious to meet the woman he loved, and to surprise Marcas prowling about the chevalier's house—Marcas, the mau who had almost fatally wounded his brother René. Cecilia was counting the hours of the trial which she had imposed upon herself, and saw the moment approach with terror, when she must choose

between a husband who sacrificed her to Carbonarism, and a lover who wished to devote his whole life to her.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, on her side, was perseveringly weaving the meshes of the net in which she hoped to ensnare the husband of her choice; isolated, silent and thoughtful like a strategist meditating a plan of campaign, she was calmly preparing both to defend herself and to make an attack.

The chevalier's letter from Rochefort had been the golden-haired beauty's signal for action. At nine, on the evening of the day when she received that missive destined to be the last ever addressed to her by her ill-fated father, Octavie sat armed for action in the study where she had formerly received the Marquis de Brouage.

She was now expecting him, and had made careful preparations for his reception. Clad entirely in black, and with her hair negligently arranged, her face pale, she was leaning in a melancholy attitude upon the cushions of the divan, where she had once sat as proudly as a queen. The skilfully managed light of a lamp left her sparkling eyes in the shade, and shone only upon her beautiful hands, which played with a jet rosary. Her foot, that exquisite foot the joggling of which had so disturbed the ex-colonel of dragoons, was modestly hidden under the long folds of her mourning attire.

She wore the dress, and sat in the attitude of an inconsolable widow. Everything around her was in conformity with her sadness. The curtains at the windows looked like funeral drapery. The chairs were covered with a dark material. The desk was closed, and had a tomb-like appearance. Even the portrait of the worthy Saint-Hélier had not escaped the change, for now it no longer seemed to smile in its customary manner.

And yet the mild June evening was inviting to love. The stir of the city was over; through the half-open window came a warm breeze bringing the delicate fragrance of the flowering lime-trees and the intoxicating scent of full-blown roses. It was a night to wander about, one with another, whispering along the shady pathways—a night when lovers choose a star among the celestial constellations.

Octavie was not looking for her star, for she did not believe in planetary influences. She believed, like Moliere's Don Juan, that two and two make four, that there is no effect without a cause, and that to will is to do, especially when one's will is firm and one is beautiful. Never had she been fairer or firmer than on the evening in question; resolute, indeed, as a gambler playing his last card, and lovely like a siren about to sing her enchanting song. She did not think of gazing at the stars, or of even glancing at the canvas upon which one of Gérard's pupils had painted the dignified countenance of Saint-Hélier. She was absorbed in listening.

Each time that she heard the distant rolling of a carriage, she lent a yet more attentive ear, and her eyes sparkled. The sound of the clock of Saint-Paul's church striking nine made her start. Almost at the same moment, the door of the study was quietly opened, and the old man-servant in the chevalier's service murmured rather than announced the name of the Marquis de Brouage.

The noble peer had come on foot, and Octavie, who was quite collected, noticed this peculiar proceeding. He came in with the ease of a noble lord, and bowed to the young girl with almost affectionate courtesy. She was no longer a stranger in his eyes; she had almost entered into his life by her bold stratagem. He felt this, and did not resist it; and from his manner Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier could perceive to what extent she

had gained ground since her first stormy interview with this rough soldier, who was at the same time a haughty nobleman. She abandoned her melancholy attitude for an instant, and after pointing to a chair she waited for him to speak.

"You sent for me, mademoiselle; I have come," said the general, in a somewhat embarrassed tone.

"I am extremely grateful to you for having granted my request," replied the golden-haired beauty. "Believe me, I entreat you, when I tell you that I had very serious reasons for applying to you in my father's absence."

"What! is not Monsieur de Saint-Hélier in Paris?" exclaimed M. de Brouage, who knew nothing of the chevalier's departure.

"No, marquis, my father went away some days ago. He did not tell me where he was going. I have not heard from him, and I do not know when he will return."

This was false, as Octavie had that very day received the letter in which the chevalier related his adventures in the coach; but the falsehood was a part of her plan of campaign.

"That is strange," muttered the general. "To leave you like this—alone, at your age—"

"Oh!" said Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, bitterly, "I have been accustomed from childhood to take care of myself. When I was born my father was very poor; in exile, we lived upon the King's kindness. We are still doing the same. I have never had any governess or companion."

"I congratulate you upon that," replied M. de Brouage, who had no great cause to appreciate the services of governesses.

"I learned at an early age to do without a guide, and without advice. My father, from system, always gave me entire liberty. He thought, and he was right, that a young girl without a fortune ought to rely upon herself. He knew that when I became an orphan I should be alone in the world, without relatives or friends."

"At least you have a friend, mademoiselle."

"Thanks for that assurance; it touches me more than I can express."

Octavie in speaking thus had the art to make a movement which brought her adorable countenance fully into the light, and the marquis saw two tears glide from her emerald eyes and roll slowly down her pale cheeks. "You are weeping?" he exclaimed, much more moved than he would have been at sight of a battle-field strewn with the dead and the dying.

"Yes, I am weeping," murmured Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, "but it is with emotion, almost with joy. You do not, and cannot know what it is to be alone in life, and to feel that no one cares for you."

"Have you never been truly loved?"

"Perhaps I have, but I could curse the day on which I inspired love. I was unable to share, and I curse myself for having inspired such passions, as their result was fatal. Without wishing it, I have been the cause of misfortunes which I can never sufficiently atone for."

"What misfortunes do you refer to?"

"If a man whom I loathe and despise had not been in love with me, he would never have almost mortally wounded Count René through jealousy. And if Count René had not been wounded by that scoundrel—"

Octavie paused as though her voice failed her, as she recalled the final result of the unfortunate duel, but the marquis finished the sentence for her. "If my nephew had not been wounded," said he, angrily, "my daughter

would not have disgraced my name, as I am well aware. But don't accuse yourself, mademoiselle, and don't regret having told me the sad truth. It is thanks to you that I have been able to take measures to stop the scandal, and as for the guilty parties, I no longer recognise their existence. I have no nephew, I have no daughter, I also am alone in the world."

A gleam of joy shone in Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier's eyes, those eyes which could always shed tears at the right moment. M. de Brouage had of his own accord come to the point to which she had wished to bring him.

"No," said she, with enthusiasm, "you are not alone, for many hearts beat in unison with yours. Do you think that the brave soldiers whom you commanded have forgotten you, the men you led in Russia, and who were indebted to you for seeing their own country again? Your brothers in arms have as much sympathy for your generosity of disposition as admiration for your courage. Have you not sown the seeds of gratitude and affection, and can't you guess that humble creatures bless you and love you in the darkness where they are hiding, far from the brilliant society in which you live?"

"You love me! you?" exclaimed the general, whom this direct thrust had wounded in the very heart.

"I! oh, no!" replied Octavie, with a wild air. "How should I dare to love you? I am but a poor girl, without birth or fortune. No, I do not love you, I must not love you, for I cannot become the Marquis de Brouage's wife, and I am too proud to be anything else to him."

The general started, but did not find anything to reply, and for the first time in his life this intrepid soldier, this nobleman accustomed to the highest society, was as disconcerted as a conscript under fire, as a student who is making his first appearance in the fashionable world. It must be admitted that he had not looked for any such direct attack, although what had previously transpired had somewhat prepared him.

Octavie judged that she had gone too far, and immediately drew back.

"Forgive me, Monsieur le Marquis," said she, passing her lovely hand over her brow, as though to collect her thoughts, for a moment disturbed by emotion, "I am bewildered, I have forgotten that I wrote to you to come to my help, and that I am abusing your kindness by keeping you here. I had forgotten that I have a favour to ask of you."

"A favour? It is you who would do me a favour by choosing me to serve you. Speak, mademoiselle, what do you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to enable me to enter a convent."

"A convent! you wish to give up the world?"

"I wish to devote myself to Heaven."

"Young and beautiful as you are, you think of burying yourself in a convent?"

"I have resolved to do so."

"At your age, and in your situation, it is a desperate resolve."

"I have taken it, for I am in despair."

"What has made you despair?"

"I am not loved by the only man whom I have ever loved," replied Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, in a stifled tone.

"What if that man loved you?"

"You know very well that it is impossible, and I am weary of living as I now live. I am weary of struggling against the fatality which weighs me down, and of suffering from the equivocal position in which I am placed. I prefer a convent to this house, which no true gentleman ever enters, where

the Marquis de Brouage only comes through pity for me, and where Count René would never have come had he not been drawn hither by a passion which was merely a fit of madness. My language surprises you, does it not? You wonder why the daughter of a nobody should venture to complain, and how it is that she does not consider herself fortunate at the prospect of some day marrying without a dowry some rich man of the middle-classes whom her beauty may charm. You are right in being surprised, Monsieur le Marquis, for you are not aware that, on my mother's side, I am allied to the oldest nobility in Europe."

"I was ignorant of that, but I might have guessed it by looking at you," replied the general eagerly.

And he looked questioningly at Octavie, who resumed with increasing animation: "My mother was a patrician lady of Venice. Her name was Angelica Bragadini, and she had doges among her ancestors. A ruined orphan, having no longer friends or country, she met a Frenchman who had followed his princes into exile, and married him. I am the child of that marriage, and I was scarcely five years old when I lost my mother, but her noble blood flows in my veins. Can you understand now why I am unwilling to endure the humiliations which I meet with every day, and why I wish to go into a convent? And," added Octavie, lowering her eyes, "why I wish to go there before my father's return?"

She remained silent, and waited for the effect of her artfully managed declaration. She had reached the decisive moment, and the success of her ambitious project depended upon the manner in which the marquis would look upon these overtures which he had not manoeuvred for. Octavie was coolly and calmly judging the situation. She very clearly saw that the marquis was touched through self-love, passion, and even affection. She understood that his domestic sorrows, and the last especially, had prepared M. de Brouage for a second marriage. But she also felt that the great obstacle in the way of her plans was the equivocal position of her father. So she had made up her mind to pitilessly sacrifice this father of hers, who was neither a chevalier, nor an esquire, nor even really named Saint-Héliér, and who, besides, filled a disgraceful post. She had resolved to begin by lessening the harm done to her on the paternal side by setting forth her noble mother's origin, thus anticipating the inquiries which she knew only too well would be made by the marquis.

The first part of this plan had proved successful, for M. de Brouage had listened with lively interest when she spoke of the departed Madame de Saint-Héliér's connection with the nobility of Venice. It was now necessary to carry the second move in her plan into effect, and this was much more difficult. However, difficulties had never dismayed the golden-haired beauty.

"Yes," said she, sadly. "I am reduced to hiding my purpose from my father, and it is for that reason that I made up my mind to entreat you to assist me. Oh! I don't ask you to take measures not suited to your disposition or lofty dignity. I don't ask you, Monsieur le Marquis, to open the cloister doors for me. I know a convent where I shall be received when I throw myself at the feet of the mother superior, and tell her that it is my firm wish to become a member of her order. But there are laws which I am ignorant of. I have, perhaps, no right to dispose of myself in this way; my father would refuse his consent if I asked for it, and might endeavour to remove me from the asylum I chose. It is against him that I ask you to protect me."

"What has he done to make you wish to leave him forever?" asked M. de Brouage, bluntly.

"It pains me greatly to have to answer you," said Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, reluctantly. "To any one but you, Monsieur le Marquis, I should refuse to display feelings which I scarcely dare to admit to myself. But it is my duty to tell you all, and I shall muster up my courage to speak. You know that in my childhood I lost the noble woman who gave me her pride of race with her blood. I was brought up by my father, and I admit that he has always shown me the deepest, the tenderest affection. I returned it fully, I loved him, and I still love him—and yet, shall I confess it?—I was still a child when I already began to suffer through him. My youthful pride suffered at seeing him render the Count de Provence, the services of an inferior."

"What services were they?"

"I do not know. He was, I believe, charged with secret missions, and did not refuse to accept them. It was necessary, for we were without resources. Later on, the King returned to France and my father followed him. Then there began what was apparently a happy life for me. There was comfort at home. His Majesty, grateful for the fidelity of the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier, granted him a large pension, and deigned to promise him a continuance of his royal protection. I ought to have rejoiced at this, but I was humiliated by it. It seemed to me that a gentleman ought not to be treated like a servant, and I said to myself that my ancestors, the Bragadinis, would never have consented to live on benefactions."

The marquis started as these haughty words were spoken, and Octavie felt that she had produced the desired effect. "I had resigned myself, however," she resumed, with emotion, "and I neither hoped nor desired anything. I was living on remembrances, on recollections that have never been effaced from my heart. The friends who visited us were objects of indifference to me. I might, perhaps, have reconciled myself to my monotonous but peaceful existence, but a day unfortunately came when my father informed me that he wished me to marry, and had found a husband for me." She paused a moment as though she hesitated to say any more, and then continued in a distinct tone: "This husband is a man who fills me with the greatest repugnance. His name is Loquetières."

"Loquetières! a spy! a police agent!" exclaimed the general. "Your father would have you marry a scoundrel like that?"

Octavie had foreseen this explosion, and her reply was ready. "I was not aware that you knew this man, or that he was a spy," she said sadly; "but I instinctively disliked him, he filled me with loathing. I read in your eyes, marquis, what you think. You are surprised that the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier should have friends of that kind. My father met this Loquetières in Germany, I know, and has always thought him a respectable man. I will do him the justice to say that he has never attempted to force me to marry him. However, I replied to his proposal by a formal refusal. I then hoped that my repose would not be troubled, when I had the misfortune to meet Count René, and the still greater misfortune to please him." Octavie's voice changed as, after a pause, she added: "I should have liked to love him, in order to get rid of that odious Loquetières. My father left me free, and would have been proud to see his daughter marry a Brouage; but I could not reply to Count René's love, and yet I had the weakness to hesitate telling him that my heart was no longer my own. But I have been cruelly expiated this fault. I have never ceased to reproach

myself. You are aware also that my father's secretary had the audacity to court me. I have had him dismissed. I could not foresee what occurred, but now my father more than ever wishes to bring about the hateful marriage, which he has been speaking of for a year past. You see that I must either enter a convent or die."

"And so," said M. de Brouage, slowly, "it is in order that you may not belong to this man that you wish to renounce the world?"

"For that reason, and also because I am out of place in this world, where no one feels any interest in me. I should be less unhappy in a convent than in this house. At least, I should have the peace of the cloister while waiting for the repose of the grave."

"Why do you say that no one feels any interest in you?" asked the marquis, taking hold of the tearful beauty's hand.

Octavie allowed him to retain it in his own. He felt it tremble, and his heart beat as though he had been but twenty years of age. The emotion which he felt was indeed so great that he departed from the cautious language which he had hitherto made use of. "If I told you," said he, in an impassioned tone, "that I have the liveliest, the tenderest sympathy for you, would you still persist in entering a cloister?"

"Yes," replied Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, "for if you told me that, I should suffer still more, I should suffer at being separated from you by birth and by rank. It is better that I should never see you any more; perhaps I shall succeed in forgetting you."

"Rank? I can raise you to mine. Birth? why, on your mother's side you are as noble as I am."

Octavie took good care not to follow the general along the path to which a revival of youthful ardour had led him. She was much too cunning to trust to a passing transport, and skilful enough to answer her ardent worshipper in the language of reason.

She withdrew her hand, and said in a firm tone: "No, marquis, you could not raise me to yourself; no, I am not as noble as you are. What does it matter if my maternal ancestors are inscribed in the Golden Book of Venice? My father is barely a nobleman, and there are social gulfs between the daughter of the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier and the head of one of the most illustrious houses of France." Octavie well knew that these words would add fire to the flame which she pretended she wished to extinguish, and she added, gravely: "If I aspired to marry General de Brouage, a marquis, a peer of the realm, I should be both mad and guilty, for the world would never forgive such a misalliance."

"The world!" exclaimed the former colonel of dragoons. "What is the world's opinion to me? I am in the habit of making my will felt, and I don't admit the right of any one to judge my actions. Whoever undertakes to blame the choice I make, in public, will have me to deal with."

He looked superb as he spoke thus. He had risen abruptly, and, standing with sparkling eyes and head erect, he seemed ready to lead a squadron to battle. Octavie gazed at him, and her countenance expressed more than admiration. It expressed something inexplicable, almost ecstasy. Her cheeks flushed, and her parted lips murmured these words, which an impassioned memory evoked: "The portrait on horseback—on the battle-field of the Beresina—you now look as you do in that picture." Then her long eyelashes fell over her beautiful eyes, her hand trembled, and she seemed about to swoon.

"What distresses you?" exclaimed M. de Brouage.

"Ah!" murmured Octavie, dejectedly, "it is but a dream—it will vanish—why prolong it, why thus intoxicate myself with hope? The awakening would be too cruel. Have pity upon me! Cease to prompt illusions which would cost me so dear—say no more!—if I listened to you I should not have courage to relinquish the world."

"Relinquish the world? Simply because you fear the malice of fools and the calumny of the wicked? Do you think that I would allow the Marchioness de Brouage to be insulted? Who would dare to insult her? Am I not free from the only tie that could have bound me? Did you not hear me say that I renounced my daughter?"

"Forgive her! She loved him!"

"Forgive her? Never! I know her no more. I do not know whether she exists or not. I am alone, and I shall remain alone."

"Have mercy, my head reels!" resumed the siren of the Place Royale in a different tone. "Speak no more to me of a happiness I fear—"

"You fear? What need you fear? You need not fear your father, or the scoundrel to whom he wishes to marry you! You need not dread René who trifled with you, or the unfortunate girl whose reputation he destroyed. Who can it be that you fear? Can it be that spadassin, Marcas?"

"What I fear is that happiness will kill me. And as you have mentioned the name of a man I abhor, I must now remind you that the wretch has been dismissed from my father's house, and will never dare to appear here again."

"If he had the audacity to show his face here, I would trample him under my feet as I would a snake. He will perhaps venture to do so. Has he not presumed to write to you?"

"True. But I shouldn't have read his infamous letter if I had known from whom it came."

"He no doubt expressed his intention of returning to Paris?"

"No. He knows that I hate and despise him. He only wrote to me to take his revenge for the scorn I showed him. By telling me that Count René did not love me, and that he had given him a serious wound, he thought that he would cause me a mortal pang."

"Have you that letter still?" asked the general, abruptly.

At this question Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélér started, not with fear, but with delight. The marquis was jealous. She had him in her power. "No," she replied without in the least becoming confused, "I have burnt it. It seemed to me that it soiled my hands. It was too much already to have read it. But the man who has insulted me shall learn what I think of him. I shall not lower myself so far as to reply to him myself. However, when my father returns, I shall request him to write to Monsieur Marcas—my father undoubtedly knows where he is—and tell him all the disgust I feel. And now, I entreat you, do not recall this odious recollection again."

The marquis made a gesture which expressed his feelings with regard to the secretary of Saint-Hélér, and his eyes met those of Octavie. She was at that moment seeking a means for returning to a subject which interested her much more than young Victorin did. M. de Brouage had gone very far, but he had not yet bound himself. She must now make him irrevocably hers, and she thought that the time had come for using all her weapons. Tears had succeeded very well at the beginning of the interview. So she had recourse once more to the waterworks, and calling all

the seductions of an enticing attitude to her aid, she burst out weeping again. No one could shed tears as she knew how to shed them.

The general was stepping towards her, when the noise of a window-pane breaking made him start and stop. A heavy object thrown from out-of-doors passed near him and fell upon the floor. Suddenly, forgetting the grief which seemed to overwhelm her, Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier darted towards this strange projectile, but M. de Brouage was quicker than she was, and appropriated it. It was a large key wrapped in a paper. "A letter!" he exclaimed. "Who dares to write to you in such a way as this?"

Octavie hung her head, but did not reply.

The clock of St. Paul's Church struck ten. Octavie had forgotten the hour, and this was a strange oversight, for she knew by heart a certain letter from Marcas which had told her that he would, between ten and eleven, acquaint her with his presence in Paris by throwing her a message attached to a key. This letter, handed to her by Bernaville on the night of the performance of *Ogier the Dane*, had not greatly disturbed her at first. The student had said that he would soon return; but he had not specified the day of his arrival, and Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier hoped that his wound would detain him a long time at Rochefort. The chevalier's epistle had undeceived her in that respect. He had told his daughter that he had met his young secretary at Niort, on his way back to Paris. Thereupon the golden-haired beauty had made up her mind to make a prompt attack upon the Marquis de Brouage. She especially desired to win the game before Marcas could appear to interfere with her plans. So she wrote the general a well-turned note, in which every word had its special intention, and requested him to call on her that evening at nine o'clock.

She would have preferred another hour, and another place of meeting, but she thought that the French peer would prefer not to be seen visiting Saint-Hélier's house in broad daylight, and she especially relied upon the light of a lamp skilfully arranged to bring out her beauty in a new way. She certainly did not fear daylight like faded women do, but she had a way of making her eyes produce a dazzling and simply irresistible effect by lamp-light. The chevalier's study was the only room in the house where she could receive the marquis without spoiling her own plans or wounding propriety, the drawing-room was far too large, too solemn. Besides, the first interview with M. de Brouage had taken place in the elegant apartment where the director of the Dark Room dictated his correspondence to his secretary, and the marquis would naturally expect to be received there when he came again.

Unfortunately, this study was upon the first floor, and its window opened on the Place Royale. If Marcas followed the plan laid down in his letter, it was by this window that he would surely throw in his key with the explanatory message. To prevent this projectile from arriving at an inconvenient moment, Octavie had imagined that all she need do would be to draw the curtains. She fancied that the student, not seeing any light in the study, would abstain from announcing his presence in this eccentric style.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier had not contented herself, however, with this precaution. She had taken care, also, to leave the window barely ajar. She would have preferred to have shut it entirely, but the heat was very great, and it might, she feared, incommode the general, who was nearly sixty, and oblige him to beat a retreat sooner than was desirable.

Like all great warriors, Octavie did not neglect any detail in making ready for battle. Nothing had availed, however. She had not counted upon Marcas's keen eyesight and rare impudence. He had detected a ray of light between the curtains, and had without any hesitation broken the window-pane.

The fiend had something to do with all this, for the compromising missive came through the window at the precise moment when M. de Brouage was about to fall completely into the trap laid for him, and find himself so thoroughly ensnared that he would never again be free. The Southerner had aimed the key so well that it had fallen close beside the general, who had hastened to pick it up. Octavie at once realised that she would be lost if her noble lover read the missive, and she made a desperate effort to parry the fatal blow.

"This is outrageous!" she exclaimed, but without seeming confused. "This is the second time that the same thing has happened. I must send my maid away."

"What do you mean?" asked M. de Brouage, with mingled surprise and emotion.

"She is a girl whom my father engaged to wait upon me, and who has but one fault—that of pleasing a footman in this neighbourhood. Our servants have orders not to let the man come into the house, and so as to correspond with his fair one, he has recourse to violent measures."

Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier said all this with a great deal of composure, but her face betrayed her. She was lividly pale, and her lips quivered.

"How strange!" said the marquis. "The footman cannot imagine that your maid makes it a practice of staying in your father's study."

"She often comes here; and neither she nor her admirer supposed that I should spend part of the evening here. It was no doubt arranged between them that her Romeo should come under the window to announce himself. My maid's name is Juliet," added Octavie, with a forced smile. M. de Brouage did not laugh, however. His manly face was dark, and he tightly grasped the paper wrapped about the key. It may easily be guessed that he was divided between the temptation to read the letter and the scruples which always prevent a gentleman from unsealing any communication not addressed to himself.

"I will send Mademoiselle Juliette away," resumed Octavie. "And, to punish her insolent suitor, the best plan, I should think, would be to send back his message in the same way as it came."

This answer was very cleverly contrived, with the double object of preventing the note from being read, and Marcas from being discouraged, but it did not agree with the ideas of M. de Brouage.

"It does not suit me," said he, drily, "to meddle with the intrigues of a footman and a servant-girl, and it is still less the place for Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier to do so."

"You are right, Monsieur le Marquis. Forget this foolish matter, and leave the key upon my father's desk. It will be best that on his return he should know what to think of the maid he selected for me."

The marquis showed no haste, however, to conform with this gracefully expressed request.

"There is a letter with this key," said he, looking fixedly at Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier.

Octavie was beginning to recover herself; and she replied, with the

utmost coolness. "Yes, some letter from that lover in livery, the style must be remarkable."

"Very. I am quite curious to see it."

This time Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier realised that her peeress's coronet was gone forever, and she cursed the day when she had listened to her father's private secretary. The catastrophe was near at hand, and it was no longer in her power to ward off the threatened blow. She must make some reply. Silence would be equivalent to a confession; and such also would be the import of any request not to read the letter. A gleam of hope remained to her. Perhaps Marcas had not signed this missive, and perhaps he had couched his note in somewhat ambiguous terms, such as might leave a doubt in the mind of M. de Brouage. If so, Octavie would still be safe, for she thought that she could invent some explanation which would bring the general to her feet again, in shame and confusion at having suspected her.

"Read it, Monsieur le Marquis," she said quietly. "Read it aloud, unless the footman has written to the girl in language unfit for me to hear."

M. de Brouage, disturbed, and still hesitating, unsealed the letter fastened to the key, which he did not let go of, and approaching the light he began to read the note. Unfortunately for Octavie, Victorin Marcas's prose was extremely clear and precise.

The young Southerner had written as follows :

"I arrived in Paris this morning. My wound is almost healed, but Count René is still in his bed and will remain there for a long time. He will not die of the sword-thrust which I gave him, but there is something to make up for that. His cousin, the daughter of the French peer, has gone to meet him. She is with him in a cottage nine miles from Rochefort. She will not die either, but she is compromised. All that she can do now will be to marry the impecunious country squire who ventured to make love to you, or pretended to be in love with you—"

"You said that this letter was addressed to your maid," said the general with terrible calmness.

On hearing the first words, Octavie had risen to her feet. She realised that she was conquered, and only thought of covering her retreat. "You are doing a thing unworthy of a gentleman, Monsieur le Marquis!" she exclaimed. "I will not listen to this infamous letter any longer."

So saying she took a step as if to leave the room, but M. de Brouage stopped her with an imperious gesture. "Stay!" said he harshly, "it will be your punishment."

And he continued to read: "'I have, you see, executed your orders better than you expected; when you ordered me to wage war upon the accursed race of the Brouage—'

"Your orders! You ordered this Marcas to kill my nephew! For this letter is from Marcas. Confess it! confess it!" exclaimed the general, stepping towards Octavie.

She drew back, but crossed her arms, and with a haughty air replied: "I confess nothing, and I repeat that your conduct is shameful! To crown it, you need only strike a woman."

M. de Brouage had the strength to control his anger, and continued to read: "'I have risked my life. It belonged to you, and does so now. I

long to kneel at your feet, to tell you how I worship you. Is it asking too much to entreat you to grant me a couple of hours to-night? I cannot go to your house. Your servants know me, but you can go out as your father is absent, I met him at Niort. He was disguised, but I recognised him. He was travelling with Loquetières, who was disguised also. They were, perhaps, running after Mademoiselle de Brouage—”

On again finding his daughter's name in Marcas's letter, the marquis uttered an angry cry; he was about to crush the note in his hand and throw it from him. Even more disgusted than indignant, he for a moment thought of ceasing to stir up all this filth. But he wished to see how far the creature, by whom he had so nearly been bewitched, had fallen, and so he resumed his perusal.

“‘I told you that on the night of my arrival in Paris I should throw a key and a letter in at your window. I do so. But I cannot wait for you in the street, still less under the arcade. In summer-time the neighbours take the air in front of their houses and they all know me. If we meet there, the whole street would know it. My lodgings in the Rue des Grès are not worthy to receive you, and you could not go there without compromising yourself.

“‘I propose this: I have at my disposal a garden, which no one except myself can enter, and I shall go there as soon as I have thrown this letter into your father's study. I hope that you won't refuse to meet me, for I know that you are courageous, and I think that I deserve the happiness of seeing you. You imposed many trials upon me; I have gone through them all. Zimena promised that she would be the reward of my victory. Zimena will keep her promise—”

While M. de Brouage was reading, Octavie had again taken her seat on the sofa and reassumed a careless attitude. She pretended to play in an indifferent manner with an ivory paper-knife, and one might have fancied that the matter in hand did not concern her in the least. The general was anxious to get to the finish, and indeed he now came to the last paragraph of the epistle in which Marcas so clearly claimed the reward of his guilty services. “‘This garden is not very far from the Place Royale; you can reach it by proceeding along the Rue des Francs Bourgeois to the Rue du Chaume, which you must follow, and which will lead you by the Rue du Grand-Chantier to the Rue des Enfants-Rouges—’

“‘Rue des Enfants-Rouges!’ exclaimed M. de Brouage. The name recalled a vague recollection.

“‘About half-way along this last street, on the left, you will see the entrance of a blind alley, bordered on one side by old houses and on the other by a high wall. Half-way down this blind alley, and on the side of the wall, you will come to a little door. Open it boldly with the key which I send you. I have another key of the same door; it is that of the garden, where you will find me. I shall expect you; if you don't come I shall think—’

“‘The wall of the garden! the blind alley! the Rue des Enfants-Rouges!’ cried the general, without ending the letter, for he now remembered everything. “‘It is true, then! It is as that spy declared! It was there that my son was killed, and the man who killed him is the wretch who threw you this key—that Marcas!’”

And pale, threatening and terrible, he strode towards Octavie. For the first time since the interview had grown stormy, Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélér felt alarmed. She rose and rushed towards the window to call for the help of Marcas, the only man to whom she could now appeal. Of all her lovers, only an accomplice remained, and she hoped he was still under the window.

But the general intercepted her, and said in a rough tone: "Do not stir!" And going to the window, he closed it and returned to Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélér.

"If you still retain any self-respect," said he, "you will not open this window when you are alone. Besides it would be useless, for your lover is undoubtedly far off by this time. He has gone to the place of assignation, which he speaks of. I do not advise you to go there, for you will find me there."

"What do you mean to do?" exclaimed Octavie, wildly.

"An act of justice," replied the Marquis de Brouage, coldly.

And, after darting a look full of scorn at the woman at whose feet he had been about to fall, he left the house without another word.

The siren did not attempt to detain him, and did not ask for the key or the letter. She saw that the game was irrevocably lost, and was not sorry that the general should turn his anger against Marcas. Marcas could no longer be of use to her, in fact he was in her way, and whatever might happen to him, she had nothing to fear, for, excepting the marquis, there was no one to prove that he had been the instrument of her perfidious designs. She very well knew that the marquis would not compromise himself by noising abroad the revenge which he was about to inflict upon the student.

The marquis, in fact, was now only thinking of punishing his son's murderer. His mind was made up. He had sworn to himself that the wretch should die by his hand and his only. He crossed the room which the poor chevalier was never again to enter, and almost ran into the antechamber, where he came nigh upsetting the old servant who had let him in.

Although M. de Brouage had affirmed the contrary to keep Octavie quiet in the room till he had left the house, he still believed that Marcas was still in the Place Royale. He was mistaken. Marcas was no longer there. Under the trees and arches the general only saw some quiet families belonging to the neighbourhood, who were taking the air. These people were few in number, for it was now late, and the student had succeeded in throwing his message without attracting any special attention, although he had broken a window-pane. It was evident that he had fled as soon as he had done so, and was now far off.

However, the general knew where to look for him, and did not hesitate to start in pursuit. Loquetières had spoken to him of a blind alley and garden forming the corner of the Rue des Enfants-Rouges. The letter from Marcas confirmed this information, and also gave a full line of route, enabling him to go straight from Octavie's house to the garden. M. de Brouage remembered every word, but he was but little acquainted with the neighbourhood. His youth had been passed in fighting on all the battle-fields of Europe, and since peace had been established, he never left his house except in a carriage or on horseback. So regular were his habits in this respect, that Pierre Dugué and Jean Taupin had been greatly surprised and somewhat uneasy at seeing him go off on foot before nine o'clock, along the Quai de Bourbon, which was deserted after sunset. The good servants knew that

their master had many sorrows, and they had feared some desperate resolve on his part.

But M. de Brouage was not a man to commit suicide, and as he left Saint-Hélier's house, he was thinking much more of living than of dying. After glancing about him on the Place Royale, and making sure that his son's assassin was no longer there, he asked the first person who passed by to direct him to the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois. He then followed that street to the Rue du Chaume, which he knew very well from having gone several times to the National Archives, which, since 1808, had been installed in the old Hôtel de Soubise. The glories of the imperial epoch had not made the ex-colonel of the 9th Dragoons forget the lofty deeds of his ancestors, and he had had occasion to examine an old charter which set forth the details of a loan made in 1189 to a Brouage who was starting for Palestine. However, his thoughts were not now upon the crusades. He longed to reach the blind alley so clearly described in the letter, and he went quickly through the Rue du Chaume.

By chance the street-lamps were still lighted, and he could, without any difficulty, read the names of the various streets at the different corners. He thus passed the Rue de Braque, the Rue des Vieilles Audriettes, the Rue Porte-Foin, and other lane-like streets which have changed but little since the Middle Ages. At last, after crossing the Rue de Bretagne, he found himself in front of a sort of cape formed by the intersection of two very high walls. On his left, there was a small street which the municipal authorities had utterly neglected to light, and which was bordered on one side by old buildings with pointed gables and battered frontages. There could be no mistake. The description given by Marcas was exact. This was the alley he sought. All he had now to do was to find the little door.

XXIV.

M. DE BROUAGE, without loitering or looking behind, turned the corner of the blind alley. But as he did so, he ran up against a man who was turning the corner from the opposite direction, and who threw himself on one side, giving vent to an angry exclamation. The general thought that he had Marcas to deal with, so that he clutched hold of this night prowler; but the latter, instead of trying to free himself, seized hold of the marquis. A short struggle took place, and had any of the marquis's colleagues in the Chamber of Peers chanced to pass, they would have been greatly scandalised to see a peer of France wrestling with a suspicious-looking individual.

This individual had a wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, and was wrapped up to the chin in an ample cloak. M. de Brouage was taller and stronger than he. He was able to control him and drag him under a street-lamp which hung in the middle of the Rue des Enfants-Rouges. The light of the lantern fell full upon the faces of the two combatants, and loud exclamations fell from their lips at the same instant:

"My uncle!"

"Fabien!"

The struggle naturally ceased at once, and the general, who had just recognised his nephew, demanded: "What are you doing here, sir?"

"I might ask what you yourself are doing here?" answered the viscount, disrespectfully.

M. de Brouage made an angry gesture, but restrained himself, and said in a calmer tone: "You are, of course, waiting in that alley for some of your Jacobin friends. It is just the place for conspirators to hold council together."

"What if it were so?" replied Fabien.

"Then I must ask you to give the place up to me and at once."

"I regret that I cannot conform to the desire you so emphatically express, but I have made up my mind not to leave the alley."

This time it required a violent effort on the marquis's part to control himself, for the rude language of the nephew whom he had long since banished from his house exasperated him. He had very little patience, and under any other circumstances would have gone to extremities, but he did not wish to give Marcas an opportunity to escape.

Although he was opposed to the political views of Fabien, he did not believe him to be capable of either treachery or falsehood, and it suddenly occurred to him to appeal to his good feelings to obtain some information from him.

"Remain here if you like, but tell me what I am about to ask. Have you seen anyone enter the alley?"

The viscount started. He also was looking for a man, and had not expected to find his uncle on the same scent.

"Yes," he replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"Did he enter the garden behind this wall?"

"You know that?"

"I do know it. He is still there, then?"

"That is certain, and I am waiting for him?"

"Why are you waiting for him?"

"I am waiting for him, that's enough. He escaped me by slipping in at the door and closing it before I could come up."

"You have been following him, then?"

"Yes, from the Place Royale."

"What do you want with him?"

"I want to kill him."

"To kill him! Why?"

"Because he has tried to kill my brother. You will realise that I cannot leave this place."

The general made a gesture of surprise. He understood everything at last. "The man's name is Marcas," said he, looking his nephew full in the face.

"Do you know him?" cried Fabien.

"I know him, and, like you, I wish to kill him. He murdered my son."

"He killed Henri! What is this you tell me?"

"He killed him here in that garden, to which he led him by treachery, and there he shall expiate the crime!"

"He would be dead already if I had been able to get in."

"I have a key."

"Give it to me," exclaimed Fabien.

"No, I am going to use it myself."

"What! you are going—"

"To avenge Henri."

"How can you do so? You have no weapons."

"That is true, alas!" muttered M. de Brouage, suddenly realizing his powerlessness. In the transport of anger which had seized hold of him at

Saint-Hélier's house, he had darted off in pursuit of Marcas, without remembering that he could not fight with the scoundrel upon the moment. The duelling-ground was there, but arms were wanting.

"Fortunately, I have weapons," said Fabien. "I have swords and pistols with me, for I had been warned that Marcas would be in Paris this morning. I was sure that he would go to-day to see the daughter of a scamp named Saint-Hélier. The woman was his mistress. She set him upon René, and may be, she also urged him to murder Henri. I went to the Place Royale, where she lives. I hoped that Marcas would present himself before nightfall. I wished to challenge him, to make him follow me to the Bois de Vincennes at once and fight there. I did not think that he would try to get away, and I provided myself with weapons. He did not appear till ten o'clock. I then thought of waiting till he left Saint-Hélier's house, of dogging his footsteps, of accosting him in the street when no one was near and forcing him to cross swords with me under some lamp. But he did not go into the house, he simply threw a letter in at a window and ran away. I rushed off in the same direction, and saw him turn into this alley. I darted after him, but I did not again catch a glimpse of him, though I heard a door close."

As the Marquis listened to this hurried narrative, he was greatly agitated, and when Fabien had ceased speaking he held out his hand to him and said in a voice which showed his emotion: "That is fitting. I recognize a true Brouage in you."

The viscount had not repudiated his name in changing his politics, so he warmly grasped the hand now held out to him as a sign of reconciliation by his ultra-royalist uncle.

"And now, Fabien," resumed the general, "let us enter the garden together. I shall be the first to fight. If this spadassin kills me, you shall avenge me and your brother and cousin also."

"Let us go," replied the viscount, who secretly determined that the general should not be the first to fight. And he went down the alley as he spoke, keeping close to the wall and followed by M. de Brouage.

"I hope that there is no other exit to this garden," he said.

"Don't be afraid, we shall find the villain. He is waiting there for the daughter of the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier," answered the general bitterly.

His nephew asked no explanation; he was thinking solely of Marcas, and longed to find himself face to face with him. He had, however, prudence enough not to make a noise in walking, and he urged M. de Brouage to be careful, so that the sound of their footsteps might not alarm the enemy, who could not be far from the wall. They came to the door, and as soon as the Marquis had put the key into the lock they heard a voice ask: "Is that you, Octavie?"

It may easily be believed that neither the general nor his nephew made any reply to the lover, who was waiting for his fair one behind the door. As soon as the key had turned in the lock, M. de Brouage quickly drew it out, Fabien gave the portal a vigorous push and they both entered the garden together. Marcas, who was behind the door, was almost thrown to the ground by the shock, and when, instead of seeing Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, he beheld two men, he was overcome with surprise.

"If you call out or attempt to fly, you are a dead man," said the viscount putting a pistol to his head.

While Fabien thus held Marcas in respect, the marquis locked the door on the inside and put the key into his pocket.

"Who are you? What do you wish?" asked Marcas, who had already recovered from his surprise.

Fabien went forward and replied: "I am the brother of Count René de Brouage, and I have come to kill you."

"I am the father of Count Henri de Brouage, and I have come to kill you," said the marquis.

"Very good," sneered Marcas. "I am alone, and there are two of you. I am unarmed, and you have pistols in your hands and swords under your cloak. This is a trap, I see."

"No, it is a duel, but a duel to the death," replied Fabien calmly. "We are going to fight with you in turn."

"You wish to fight with me here, and now, do you say?" asked Marcas in an ironical tone.

"Here, and now."

"You cannot mean it! Do people fight at night, and without seconds?"

"You had no seconds, and it was night when you murdered my son," replied General de Brouage in a hoarse voice.

"Your son! I never saw him. I do not know what you mean," stammered Marcas.

"That is false! I have the proofs of your crime, and could give you up to the authorities, and have you sent to the galleys. I will do so if you refuse to fight."

"I do not refuse. I merely wish to wait till daylight, and I defy you to refuse my request, unless you intend to murder me. We cannot cross swords, we could not see our weapons, and I don't suppose that you think it possible to exchange shots in this darkness."

The objection was a good one, and neither uncle nor nephew had foreseen it. Fabien had intended to fight under a street-lamp, and the lantern hanging over the Rue des Enfants-Rouges was completely hidden by the garden wall. The general, on his side, had not thought of any plan, but had darted after Marcas without troubling himself as to how the pursuit would end. They neither of them knew what reply to make to their enemy, who was openly endeavouring to gain time. The night was not very dark, but there was no moon, and the pale starlight did not suffice for people who wished to cut one another's throats according to the rules of duelling.

Still, it was sufficiently light to enable the uncle and nephew to see in what kind of place they found themselves. Boulardot had somewhat boasted in calling the place a garden, for flowers were entirely wanting there. But there were trees; numerous superb elms, set in rows, covered the broad walks with their shade. The vast enclosure had no doubt formerly served as a promenade for the Knights of the Order of Malta, who had occupied the convent after the Templars. The corporal had set some benches and wooden tables about, in order to rest and take refreshment with his friends, so that the leafy courtyard looked like a beer garden. Surrounded on two sides by the high walls, which separated it from the street and the blind alley, it was bordered on the two others by massive buildings, of which it was difficult to guess the designation at first sight, and at night-time especially. They might be the buildings of a church, a fortress, or a prison.

The marquis had Loquetières' statement in his mind, and was not ignorant of the fact that his pursuit of Marcas had brought him to a garden adjacent to the old Commanerie du Temple. But Fabien had pursued Octavie's lover without asking himself where the pursuit would lead, and

he did not know where he now found himself. Still, it seemed to him that he had seen these regular rows of trees and heavy walls before. On looking round him more attentively, he caught sight of a grating which closed a kind of archway in the lower portion of an edifice on his left. This discovery brought other recollections to his mind, and he realised that he was now in the very courtyard where three months before his brethren of the Coral Pin had subjected him to so severe a trial.

The wall behind him was that against which he had stood when facing the platoon of sham Swiss, who were ordered to pretend to fire upon him. The grating was that of the cell in which he had been shut up before the simulated execution. The huge building which he now confronted served as a storehouse for the Carbonari. It rose above the cellars where arms and uniforms were hidden, unknown to Corporal Boulardot, who, in letting his property to a man who called himself a "manufacturer in the country," had merely retained the garden for his own private use.

On the night when the Carbonari, disguised as gendarmes, arrested Fabien, the latter had reached the place by coach, had been driven in under a vaulted doorway opening on the Rue du Temple, and had gone away on foot, passing out by a secret exit near the market. He had not been aware that anyone could go in and out by the little door in the alley. He had not even known that the door existed, so it is not surprising that he did not at first recognise the scene of the trial which had so clearly proved his courage to his brother conspirators. He had never set foot in the place since his nocturnal adventure. His grade as a Carbonaro did not necessitate his appearing there, for the old convent of the Temple was only made use of on occasions of solemnity. The *ventas*, including the highest, were held in parlours or garrets, as might be, the chiefs desiring above everything to avoid the observation of the police.

However, by a singular coincidence, Fabien had that very day met Colonel Fournès, who had made an appointment with him for midnight outside the main entrance in the Rue du Temple, in view of his attending an assembly of delegates, who were summoned to meet on this occasion in the interior of the convent. He suddenly remembered that the time for holding this meeting was near at hand, and this recollection suggested an idea which would force Marcas to fight.

The general, of course, knew nothing about the affairs of the Carbonari, and they were not in his mind. He only thought of avenging Henri, and longed to end matters with the murderer. "You are a coward!" he exclaimed.

"No," coldly replied Marcas, "but I do not consent to fight under these conditions. To-morrow, in the Bois de Boulogne or the Bois de Vincennes, or wherever, and at what time you please, but not here and now."

"I tell you that I will kill you here, for it is here, in this garden, perhaps on the very spot where we now stand, that you treacherously killed my son!"

Had the marquis seen the evil smile that played upon Marcas's thin lips, he would have shuddered with horror, for he would have understood that he was indeed standing upon the spot where Henri de Brouage had fallen.

"You may insult me," replied the student with consummate impudence, "but you cannot intimidate me."

Fabien thought the moment a good one for a decisive measure, and as he had excellent reasons for not telling his uncle what he had in his mind, he stepped somewhat aside, and beckoned to Marcas, who, after a moment's hesitation, went towards him. When they were behind an elm, Fabien said,

in a tone too low to reach the general's ear : " You remember what I promised you on the day we met at Frascati's rooms ? Answer me without raising your voice."

" Yes," said Marcas, calmly. " You threatened to kill me like a mad dog if I attempted to harm your brother. You see that I remember your very words. You even then had the intention of murdering me. Do so !"

" I threatened you with something else. I threatened to deliver you over to the justice dealt out by the grandmaster of the Coral Pin Brotherhood."

" Try that if you like ! I shall have no difficulty in defending myself. It was by order of the grandmaster that I attacked René de Brouage."

" You lie ! You attacked my brother in order to carry out the designs of a miserable creature whose lover you are, and to whom you are ready to betray our secrets. I will prove it to you ! If you had received the orders which you say you received, you would be none the less guilty, for you are the tool of the daughter of a spy, who is now acting himself against the Carbonari. He is in Saintonge, and you met him there. Your suspicious acquaintances and your actions have been made known to our leaders. You are already tried and condemned. Your execution depends upon me."

" Indeed !" said Marcas, in a sarcastic tone.

" Your execution here, this very night," added Fabien.

" Here ? You surprise me !"

" If you are not aware that this enclosure, and these buildings serve for executions ordered by the high *venta*, I will now make you aware of that fact. And I will also tell you that at midnight the delegates of the central *ventas* will meet here. I know this to be a fact, as I have been called upon to appear at the meeting. Now I declare to you that I shall ask my brethren to deal out justice to you as a traitor, and at once. You say that you can justify yourself. I repeat to you that I have proof of your treachery. Still it suits me to fight with you. But if you persist in refusing the honour which I condescend to bestow upon you in doing so, you will not die by my hand, for you will be hanged. You can choose. I give you five minutes to make up your mind, and no more. Our brethren are coming, and they must find either your dead body or mine."

This short discourse deprived Marcas of a part of his assurance. He was too intelligent not to feel that he had greatly compromised himself with regard to the Carbonari, and that his assertions would not stand against those of Fabien, who stood much higher in the Association than he did, and exercised far more influence. Besides, he now longed to withdraw from a conspiracy upon the success of which he was beginning to place little reliance ; he thought of sacrificing Carbonarism to Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier, and did not in the least care to give an account of himself to the leaders of a plot from which he wished to free himself altogether. So he was disagreeably surprised to learn that he now found himself in a place where those leaders exercised jurisdiction. Marcas, being an obscure member, had not been initiated into all the mysteries of the order, and had not imagined that the garden, of which he had retained the key lent to him by Boulardot, was one in which some of the mysterious rites were performed. It was the third time that he had entered the place. The first time, he had gone there to see whether the spot was favorable for the execution of a project which Octavie had prompted, and he had discovered in one corner an old sedan-chair which he had fancied belonged to the corporal of the 6th Legion, though in reality it was the property of the Carbonari. The idea had then occurred

to him to utilize his find, and he had done so. On his second visit he had come with Count Henri, and had not remained long. He had had no opportunity to examine the buildings adjoining the garden, and besides, the doors and gratings being always closed, he could not have entered these buildings even if he had been able to guess for what purpose they were used.

He now knew everything, for he did not doubt the truth of what the viscount told him, and he asked himself whether he had not best accept his adversaries' proposition.

After all, two duels would be better than an almost certain condemnation. By fighting he had a chance of getting away. Only he would not fight with swords. His wound was scarcely closed, and would have prevented him from fencing well, and he wished to preserve whatever advantage still remained to him. He was an excellent shot with pistols, but of course it is impossible to use fire-arms to any effect when nothing is visible ten paces off.

Fabien at last put an end to his indecision. "Well," asked the viscount, "what have you made up your mind to do?"

"One question before I reply," said Marcas, suddenly. "If I consent to fight and kill either of you, how do I know that the other one won't denounce me to the leaders?"

"You have no such danger to fear, for it is with me that you must fight the first, and you are well aware that General de Brouage isn't one of us."

"That is true, but, on the other hand, he may hand me over to the police when he leaves here."

"He won't leave here, or you won't, since the struggle will last till one or the other falls."

"Very well, then I return to my first objection. How can we fight in the dark. I warn you that I am not in a condition to hold a sword. Your brother ran me through the shoulder. Pistols remain; I see that you have one in your hand and another in your belt, but—"

"Look!" interrupted Fabien, pointing at the building on the opposite side of the garden. "You see that there is light enough to fight by. Look at the cellar window there, it is lighted up!"

Marcas turned quickly, and saw that there was a dim light on the opposite side of the garden, and almost level with the ground. When he had slipped in by the little door he had seen no light whatever. He was sure that it must have been kindled since then, and it followed that there must be some one in the building.

"There are persons in a cellar there, it appears," said he. "So we cannot fight, for they would surprise us here."

"I have a different way of thinking. You objected just now to the absence of witnesses. These people will serve as seconds."

"Do you know them?"

"I don't, but I will tell them who I am. They are at any rate brethren of the Coral Pin Association, 'serving-brethren,' who are preparing the subterranean hall for the assembly of delegates which, as I told you, will be held here at midnight."

"How can you be certain? How do you know that the police haven't taken possession of the building? The conspiracy may be found out, the assembly may have been betrayed to them. To enter this cellar would be stepping deliberately into a trap. The best thing that we can do, in your interest, and mine, is to make off as soon as possible— However, your

uncle, the marquis, can remain," added Marcas, who could not resist the temptation to be sarcastic; "the police will show him all the honour that is due to him."

"Enough raillery and false excuses," said Fabien, drily. "You know as well as I do that if the police were here we should already be arrested. So don't attempt to escape if you do not wish me to summon the brethren who are at work down there. I am their superior, and if I gave them the order they would seize you and shut you up in a safe place till the chiefs arrived."

"But, once more," exclaimed Marcas, who was now reduced to his last excuse, "even if we had seconds we couldn't fight in darkness."

Fabien was about to reply by a final argument, but he saw the general coming towards him, and he wished that he should hear the end of the talk. M. de Brouage, since his nephew had left him, had been stamping about impatiently, and after the conversation, which was inaudible to him, had lasted three minutes or so, he could hold out no longer. He also had seen the light; and he wished to warn Fabien that the cellars of the convent were occupied, and urge him to end the matter at once. It is needless to say that he was not aware of the fact that he had come to a place where a council of Carbonari was about to be held. Loquetières had indeed told him that the old buildings of the Temple served as a den for a band of conspirators or coiners, but he was too angry to remember his conversation with the spy. The viscount guessed the questions which his uncle was about to ask him, so he took him on one side, and said to him in a low tone: "I believe that I have finally prevailed on this villain to fight. I have succeeded in this by threatening to hand him over to the vengeance of a secret society to which he has turned traitor, and which will hold a meeting here to-night."

"A secret society to which you belong, eh?" asked the marquis.

"Why should I deny it? I know you to be too honourable to abuse the chance which has placed your political enemies at your discretion. Yes. I am conspiring against that government which you defend, and others who are also conspiring against it will meet here in an hour's time. They will assemble in the building which you can discern in the distance yonder. I tell you this, as I feel sure that you will not betray them. You are a royalist, but you are a nobleman, and a nobleman never lowers himself to betray any one."

The general made a gesture which Fabien chose to consider as favourable. "The light shining in front of us has just been lit by men belonging to the brotherhood, men who will obey me, for I have the right to command them," resumed the viscount. "They would, if there were need of it, help me to overpower this Marcas, and if they see you with me they will not ask who you are. I therefore propose that we should go down into this vault and take our prisoner with us. If he attempts to fly, I will blow out his brains. We shall find men there to take part in the affair, and torches to light us. In a few moments all will be over, and if, as I hope, I kill this traitor, I give you my word of honour that you will be free to go away, and no one shall follow you or ever know that you have set foot in this garden."

"You propose," said M. de Brouage, slowly, "that I who am a marquis, a lieutenant-general, and a peer of France, you propose that I should commit myself with Jacobins who are conspiring against the King."

"These Jacobins, as you choose to call them, won't ask your name. Besides, there are only three or four subalterns there. The chiefs won't

see you, for they won't be here for an hour's time. However, if you do not care to come with me, there is nothing to hinder you from leaving the garden. You have the key of the little door. Go, I will act alone! To-morrow you will hear from me that Henri is avenged, or learn that I am dead."

There was a moment's silence. M. de Brouage hesitated. Fabien's last words caused him to make up his mind. "No," said he, "I will remain. It is my place to punish my son's murderer. If I fall you will take my place."

"I am waiting till you finish your deliberations," growled Marcas, who had gradually drawn nearer to the speakers.

"Come," said Fabien to him.

"Where?"

"Where we can see to fight."

"In that cellar by torchlight?"

"Yes."

"Well, I consent to go with you on one condition."

"It is my right to dictate to you."

"On condition that I fight with the marquis."

"That is just what I intend," cried the general.

"And I intend that we shall draw lots, to decide who is to fight first," said Fabien, eagerly. "But we have hesitated long enough. Go on, or I will blow out your brains!" he added raising the pistol which he held.

Marcas saw by the expression of the viscount's eyes that he was a man to carry out his threat. He reflected that chance would, perhaps, favour him by giving him the general as his first antagonist, for the old soldier's hand could hardly be as steady as Fabien's, and he replied: "So be it! I am ready. Show me the way."

The nephew placed himself on the student's left hand, so as to keep him still within range of his pistol. The uncle placed himself on the right, and thus escorted, Marcas, who no more thought of temporizing, went on towards the building which bordered the garden on one side. The door of this building was open, a door surmounted by an arch. A flight of steps led to the cellars, where the Templars had in former days stored their wines, and where the brethren of the Coral Pin Association held meetings on certain occasions. Marcas made no difficulty about entering. He had calculated all his chances, and saw that it was the only thing that he could do.

The steps were lighted by a gleam from the torches in the vault below. The descent was easy. Once below, Fabien went forward and proceeded to the threshold of a vaulted hall, where a man was lighting some rosin torches hitched to iron stays projecting from the wall. This servant of the Association had thought himself so secure in his cellar that he had taken no precaution to prevent a surprise. His back was turned to the new-comers, and the viscount was about to call out the password, when the torch-lighter, hearing some footsteps, suddenly turned round.

To Fabien's great surprise and still greater delight, he recognized the old soldier who had played the part of adjutant at the mock trial. It was the worthy man who had thrown his arms around the viscount's neck when the guns of the sham Swiss were lowered, after the order to fire had been given, and who had so warmly congratulated him on having refused to write to his lady-love. Since that memorable night, Fabien had met him two or three times at the Café Lemblin, and had never failed to treat him to several glasses of brandy, a little attention which had won him the

eternal friendship of the ex-chasseur of the imperial guard. The meeting was a lucky one, and the viscount lost no time in turning it to account.

"What! is it you, brother?" he exclaimed. "This is lucky indeed! Will you do me a favour?"

"Two, if you like, brother," gaily answered the old guard. "But it seems to me that your watch must be fast. The meeting won't take place till midnight."

"I know that; we have a little affair on hand which must be settled before the meeting. I am here with two brethren," added Fabien, pointing to the general and Marcas.

"Oh! I don't suppose you would bring strangers here. But how the deuce did you get into the garden?"

"The head of my *venta* gave me a key of the little door. I told him our little matter, and as he has confidence in me, he has given me an authorization to settle the matter on the quiet providing all be over before the meeting hour."

"Are you going to entertain yourself with a little fencing?"

"No, with a little firing. You understand, old fellow; being brothers, we didn't want to fight duels out of doors, or by daylight. You know that we are forbidden to do anything that might attract the attention of the police. That is why I thought it best to come here."

"It was a good idea. You might exchange half a dozen shots without being heard in the street. The walls are ten feet thick. Your 'little matter' is serious then?"

"Very serious and we cannot wait."

"You yourself are going to fight?"

"Yes."

"With the old brother over there?" asked the soldier, looking at General de Brouage, who, under any other circumstances, would not have submitted to be spoken of in such a manner, but who felt the necessity for being silent.

"No," replied Fabien, "with the young one. And if I am killed or wounded, they will fight it out between them."

"If it were fencing, I would not let the same man stand against two in turn; but it isn't necessary to take breath between two shots. It is to the death, then?"

"Yes, to the very death."

"The deuce it is! then there will be two tragedies here to-night, and real tragedies too. The council is to meet to try a traitor who will surely be sentenced to death and executed on the spot. He was denounced this morning, and must have been arrested this evening. He will be brought here at midnight. Perhaps you might know him: his name is Marcas."

"Marcas!" repeated Fabien. "You are sure that the man who is to be judged and executed is named Marcas?"

"Quite so," replied the old soldier. "Colonel Fournès told me so, this afternoon, at the Palais Royal. It seems that the grandmaster of the Coral Pin received a letter from Brother Lormier, who is away on a mission, and it denounced the treachery of this Marcas."

"And you think that the traitor is already arrested?"

"It is probable. He must have arrived in Paris to-day, and measures have been taken to arrest him to-night in the Rue des Grès, where he lives. It seems that he is a student. I have never seen him, but I know that he is not worth the hemp that will hang him. For he will be hanged. See!"

So saying the old soldier pointed to a hangman's rope suspended from the ceiling of the vault, and swinging within four feet of the floor.

Octavie's lover had not lost a word of this instructive conversation, and as it may be believed, he made a sorry figure. He glanced towards the steps, and the marquis, guessing that he contemplated flight, placed himself before the door, so as to impede the way.

"However," said Fabien, who wished to know something more as to the exact state of affairs, "if they don't succeed in laying hands upon the culprit, the meeting will, no doubt, be adjourned."

"No, no. They will meet all the same, and try Marcas as though he were present. They have summoned witnesses who will testify against him, and when once he is sentenced, they will catch him to-morrow, or the next day; he will be none the better off for waiting.

Fabien now understood why Fournès had asked him to come to the meeting of the Carbonari. His testimony was wanted to show that Marcas had an intimate connection with Saint-Hélîer, and frequented the society of the spy Loquetières. "Thanks, brother," said he. "I see that we must make haste to finish with our matter, so as to make room for the tribunal. Finish lighting up the rooms while we arrange the conditions of the combat."

"As you please," replied the ex-chasseur of the imperial guard. "When you need me you can call me."

And he resumed his task, which simply consisted in lighting the torches, for in the vault there were neither seats for the judges nor a bench for the accused. For the "tests," the audience hall where Fabien had formerly undergone a mock trial, was reserved, but in cases like that of the student, the most summary procedure was resorted to. The viscount now turned to Marcas, who was lividly pale, and said to him in a low tone: "You have heard everything. I presume that you will now give up making excuses to avoid fighting." The marquis drew near to hear these final words of remonstrance: "If you persist in refusing," resumed Fabien, "you know what fate awaits you. It would be better to fight. It is the only chance left you."

"I see that you have led me into a trap," replied Marcas angrily.

"No, for I did not know that you were to be judged here to-night, and you entered this garden voluntarily."

"It is none the less true that you are abusing the chance which led me here. Why should I submit to the conditions which you lay down? There is nothing to show that I could get away, even if I killed you one after the other. The persons who presume to try me will come, recognise me, and not allow me to depart. That old scoundrel there, whose friend you seem to be, would prevent me from leaving."

"You are mistaken. You shall be free. I will give him orders in your presence not to oppose your flight, and he will obey me, believe me. I promise upon my honour to do nothing to detain you, no matter what may happen. General de Brouage is not a conspirator. He has no authority here whatever, and you have nothing to fear from him. It depends upon you to finish everything before midnight. If you kill us, you have only to repair to the little door, of which you have the key in your pocket. No one will follow you. I am aware that I ought not to allow you to escape the justice of the brethren; I know that they have a right to hold me responsible for your escape. But I care very little for that. I wish to fight with you, and I will submit without complaint to whatever consequences may follow upon my determination."

"And I," said the marquis, "who have no account to render to the Carbonari, promise on my honour that I will not do anything to harm you after the duel."

"Well?" asked Fabien, "have you decided at last?"

Marcas still hesitated. He was restless like a wild beast caught in a snare, and sought for a final stratagem, but could think of none.

"So be it!" said he at last. "Make your plans. You know that I am not able to hold a sword. My wound has scarcely healed."

"We accept pistols."

"I shall be forced to use the weapons brought by you, and certainly tried beforehand."

"You are mistaken. The pistols are new. I bought them for this express purpose to-day, in readiness for the duel which I meant to fight with you."

"Very well. I will not discuss a statement which I cannot control, and I consent to give you an advantage which I cannot take from you. Still I exact an equalizing of the chances. I cannot use my right arm. I shall be obliged to hold my pistol in the left hand. You must do as I do, or I will not fight."

"I will use the left hand, like you," replied Fabien, quietly.

"I will do the same," said the general.

"The pistols shall be loaded by me."

"By you, agreed!" said the uncle and nephew together.

"We shall place ourselves at the two ends of this cellar. It is forty feet long or nearly. We shall advance or remain in position as we choose, and fire at will."

"We accept."

"It will be allowable for us to walk forward till we are within five paces of each other, and each of us may reserve his fire, and fire upon his adversary at that distance."

"Agreed!"

"And the fight shall continue till one or the other falls."

"That is my intention," said Fabien. "I have twenty ball-cartridges with me. It is impossible to exhaust all of them without hitting one another. Each shall have three to begin with."

"And each of us, after firing, shall re-load his pistol without any help from either of the others," eagerly added Marcas. "I am one against two, and I naturally take my precautions."

"We do not dispute anything. Let us finish all this," said the marquis, impatiently.

"You must now draw lots to see which of you shall begin," said Marcas.

"I should have preferred the marquis, as he has a more serious grievance against me than all that you bring forward."

"You confess, then, that you killed my son?" cried the marquis.

"I confess it," said Octavie's lover, who had held this reply in reserve, in order to force his adversaries to settle the question of priority as he desired.

The unfortunate Henri's father was about to claim his right, but Fabien prevented this by calling to the old trooper, who had finished lighting his torches. "Brother, all is arranged. We have only to decide which of us two shall fight first. Come and help us to draw lots!"

"I have what you want," replied the old soldier, going towards the group, and taking five or six uniform buttons from his pocket. "Here are

some specimens from our military stores. There are enough in the place for all the regiments in the Paris garrison. You and the old brother there must each take one of the buttons I hold in my hand. The one whose button has the highest number on it, shall be the one to begin."

Fabien hastily took one button, and the general was obliged to do likewise, for he could not, in the old trooper's presence, bring forward his reasons for wishing to fight before his nephew. He would have been obliged to betray his incognito, which he had every possible motive for keeping. Chance favoured Fabien. The button which he drew bore number forty-five upon it, that of the regiment in which the Carbonari had so many adherents, while the marquis drew a button of the nineteenth regiment of the line. The question was settled, and only the final preparations remained.

"Good!" said the old soldier, "it is for you to open the ball. You have agreed as to the conditions, I suppose?"

"Yes. We shall advance from the two ends of the cellar. We can advance to a distance of five paces from each other, and fire at pleasure, each one loading his own pistol."

"Pretty stiff! But you know what you have to do. It is my duty, however, to ask if no better conditions can be arrived at."

"It is impossible," replied the marquis. "Honour is at stake."

"Enough! Where are the playthings?"

Fabien threw down his cloak, and the swords which he had been holding under his arm. "Here are my pistols," said he to Marcas. "They are loaded, unload them, and re-load, yourself, as we have agreed."

And he handed him the pistols, as well as a packet of cartridges.

Octavie's lover had recovered his coolness, and had resolved to profit by every advantage which his adversaries had so generously granted him. He politely requested the old soldier to hold the cartridges and one pistol, while he loaded the other one.

"Brother," said Fabien to the old trooper, "if my friend and I fall, I rely upon your not preventing our adversary from going away. He has a key of the door, like ourselves. He will use it. Our quarrel doesn't concern the leaders of the Coral Pin. We shall have ended everything before they arrive. If they question you, tell them what has occurred."

"I understand," quietly replied the veteran, who had witnessed many a duel.

"And now give me a light. I wish to smoke a cigar which may be the last one."

Tobacco was little used in those days, and the Viscount de Brouage was guilty of a sin against the rules of politeness, but he had taken the habit of smoking in the company of Colonel Fournès, who had acquired it in camp, and danger was not calculated to make Fabien depart from it at the present juncture. He lighted a cigar at the pipe which the old soldier had between his lips, and quietly waited for Marcas to load the pistols.

The marquis waited also, but not calmly, for he was enraged at finding himself a mere spectator of the drama. He cursed the chance which had brought him upon the scene after his nephew had already arrived, and he was greatly concerned as to the risk that Fabien was about to run. The self-sacrifice, devotion, and courage which the viscount had shown had touched the stern soldier's heart, and he already reproached himself for having banished him from his house, simply because the brave and generous young fellow had political views opposed to his own. Fabien acted rightly after

all, and he was a true Brouage. The general uttered the most ardent prayers in his own mind for his brother's son, and bitterly regretted having been forced to yield him his place in the contest.

Marcas on his side was as well satisfied as was possible in the critical position in which chance had placed him. He had just discovered the intention of the Carbonari to rid themselves of him, and although he had not yet escaped them, it was something to be warned of their purpose. He had escaped them by a miracle, from having gone to the Place Royale, while they were looking for him in the Rue des Grès, and he was not sorry to owe his safety to the passion which he felt for Octavie. He was thinking, while loading his pistols, of that adorable girl, and did not suspect that she had deceived him completely, and had brought about the present duel by inducing M. de Brouage to visit her. He did not know and could not ask how M. de Brouage had obtained possession of the key of the garden gate. It mattered little, however. He only thought of escaping from the peril in which he was placed, and he did not despair of doing so, resolving at the same time to prevent the Brotherhood of the Coral Pin from injuring him. "I will denounce them to-morrow," said he to himself.

Sailors in a storm make vows to go on a pilgrimage to the Virgin's shrine should they escape drowning. Marcas, before fighting, made a vow to betray his accomplices providing he were not shot. He had never been anything more than an indifferent conspirator, for he had become a Carbonaro from mere love of excitement, and from ambition. He only desired to overthrow the Bourbons in order to obtain from the next government some official position with no work and large pay, and if the Bourbons proved the victors, he would be quite willing to serve them. So that the adventure so badly begun might now end well, the only things needed were coolness, decision, skill—three qualifications which Octavie's lover possessed—and a little good luck, besides.

Good luck usually comes to those who know how to bring it about, and Marcas made arrangements for securing it for himself. He knew very well that by taking advantage of his wound to exact that his foes should fire with the left hand, he was serving his own Cause. By this arrangement, which they could not refuse to make, they were placed greatly at a disadvantage, for Marcas had long since learned to shoot with the left hand, and had acquired great skill in the practice. Thanks to the chivalry shown by the two noblemen, he had almost a certainty of killing them, and of not being killed himself. And he would, moreover, be safe when the contest was over, as the "serving brother" present had received orders from his superior, Fabien, to let the victorious party retire in peace.

Marcas was now not sorry that chance had made Fabien his first opponent, although he had previously wished to have the general in front of him. The latter was no longer young, still he was much more used to handling arms than the viscount, and it would perhaps be better to have him to deal with when his nephew had fallen. Marcas thought that grief would so agitate the uncle that his hand would tremble, and his sight fail him, but this was an error, as the ex-colonel of dragoons never trembled, and had the eyes of a hawk.

After emptying the pistols of their charge in the skilful manner of one who fully understands what he is about, the student carefully loaded them again. They were flint lock pistols, for in 1821 the old style was still in use, and they were of a size to be easily and quickly loaded with ammunition cartridges; but their exactness of fire could not be fully relied upon.

Marcas would have preferred weapons of greater precision, with which he would have been sure of his fire; but he knew how study effects and calculate the varying of the most defective arms, and as he would be able to fire several times, he felt sure that if the first shot did not tell, the second or third would do so. He thought but little of Fabien's fire, for the viscount had probably much less experience than himself, and would be less prompt in rectifying his aim.

The viscount quietly looked on, while the operation of the loading was proceeding—a somewhat complicated affair in those days—and went on smoking his cigar without a word. The marquis had folded his arms, and was silent also. The serving-brother held the cartridges, and the first pistol which Marcas had just loaded. The student was now loading the second weapon. “It is done, gentlemen,” said he suddenly, putting the ramrod back into place.

And, to give himself the satisfaction of a display of generosity, which cost him nothing, he said to Fabien: “Choose your weapon, sir; you have given me advantages enough for me to offer you that one.

Fabien, without replying, took the pistol held by the old trooper.

“Now,” continued Marcas, “let us sum up our regulations, if you are willing. We agree that each of us, to begin with, shall have three shots. Each must put two cartridges into his pocket, to be used if required. He may use them as he wishes, but without assistance. If one of us uses his three bullets without hitting his adversary, he will be obliged to wait till his adversary has exhausted his own. And if—which I hope will not happen—the six cartridges are uselessly employed, the seconds must give three more to each combatant. Apart from this, however, the seconds have no right to approach the combatants; if one of us should be wounded, or should fall, he still will have the right to fire, if able, and the one who has wounded him will also have the right to fire.”

“Till his cartridges are exhausted,” interrupted the general.

“I should prefer to fire till the wounded man expires,” said Marcas, with cold ferocity, “but I presume that death would follow on three shots taking effect. It is fully understood, is it not, that we shall advance and fire at pleasure; but it is not allowable to draw back. You swear upon your honour to follow all these rules?”

“I swear it,” said M. de Brouage.

“I swear it also,” repeated the viscount.

“Then we have now merely to take our positions at the two ends of the cellar. These gentlemen must stand back near the side-walls. But let us make haste.”

Fabien took out his watch and said: “It is now half-past eleven. The brethren of the Coral Pin Association will not be here till midnight. We have more time than we require.”

He was holding his pistol in his hand, and the old soldier gave him two more cartridges. Marcas already had his three. Everything was ready; however, the Viscount de Brouage went towards his uncle, who opened his arms and cordially embraced him.

“How touching!” sneered Octavie's lover.

“I am at your orders, sir,” said Fabien, giving him a contemptuous look. And he turned his back upon him as he strode towards the opposite side of the cellar.

Marcas repaired to the other end of this strange duelling-ground, and on his way accidentally brushed against the rope which had been hung up for

the execution ordered by the secret tribunal. The contact made him feel a disagreeable thrill, but did not cause him to lose his self-possession. He caught hold of the slip-knot and pulled upon the rope, which was passed through a ring fastened to the ceiling, and it gave way under a vigorous jerk. "This rope would be in our way in taking aim," said the student, throwing it upon the ground.

"And it will serve to mark the distance at which you must halt," replied the old soldier, who immediately began to measure five long paces, and to arrange the rope in such a way that two coils of it separated the short distance agreed upon. Thereupon he added with a growl: "All the same, you are giving me more work to do. I shall be obliged to go after a ladder to hang the rope up again. Fortunately, the store-house is not far off. That Marcas, whom the brethren are going to hang, would have a right to complain if I made him wait."

Octavie's lover heard this remark, and more than ever realised that his only chance lay in killing his two enemies as quickly as he could, so as to escape before midnight. He made haste to gain his post. The viscount was already in position. The general and the serving-brother leaned against the side-wall, and M. de Brouage gave the signal by saying in a loud tone:

"When you please, gentlemen."

Marcas had his plan ready, and did not lose an instant in executing it. He did not wish to fire his first shot at too great a distance, for he barely relied upon that shot save as a trial of his weapon; meaning to regulate the second shot with precision, according to the first result. The torches lighted by the old trooper gave enough light in the vault to enable the person firing to see the effect of his bullet, even if it struck the lower wall. As Marcas did not wish to expose himself too completely to the fire of his antagonist, he quickly went forward for a few paces, and suddenly stopping, aimed at Fabien, who was still in position, and fired. A puff of smoke went up to the wall a foot above the viscount's head.

"Good!" thought Octavie's lover. "Now I know what to think. The pistol carries high. I must aim low."

At the same instant a bullet whistled past him a little distance off. Fabien, generous to the end, had returned the fire from the spot where he had received it.

The two adversaries hastily reloaded, and were both ready at the same time. On this occasion Fabien began to pace slowly forward with his pistol high.

Marcas, on the contrary, did not stir. He knew by experience that the motion of the body makes the arm tremble. He fixed his eye upon his enemy, raised his weapon, and aimed at him as he came forward; but Fabien on his side had not yet taken aim.

The silence was profound, and the general could hear his heart beat. Even the serving-brother felt moved, and there was cause for it. There were ten chances to one that one of the antagonists would fall, for they were but twenty-five paces apart, and it was greatly to be feared that it might be the viscount, for it was easy to see that using his left hand embarrassed him. Pale but calm, and still quietly smoking his cigar, he continued to advance. At last he stopped; but his pistol fell from his hand, and after violently striking his chest, it rolled to his feet.

Marcas had fired; his bullet had struck his enemy's pistol and had then glanced back to the side wall. Fabien had but a bruise, and quickly leant

down to recover the pistol which the violence of the shock had wrested from his hand ; however, on picking it up, he saw that the cock was broken. He was now completely at the mercy of Octavie's lover, for he could not fire, and the implacable Marcas had a cartridge still in reserve.

Fabien turned towards the seconds, and said to them, pointing to the broken weapon : "It's finished, I am disarmed."

He had preserved his coolness, for he had neither let his cigar fall nor put it out.

"The duel ought to cease," cried the marquis, stepping forward.

"Do not move," said Marcas, who was already reloading. "You swore upon your honour not to help either of us."

"I did not swear to allow you to murder a man who no longer has the means of defending himself."

"Excuse me ! our understanding was a clear one. Must I remind you of it ?"

"This eventuality was not provided against."

"It was ; for it was understood that if either of us were wounded, he would have the right to fire as long as he had strength to do so, and that the individual who had wounded him should fire till his three cartridges were exhausted. Monsieur de Brouage is not wounded ; he has a loaded pistol, and a cartridge still remains in his pocket. So he has two shots to fire, and I have but one. Let him fire. I don't prevent it, but I wish to fire also."

"This is mere mockery !" exclaimed the general. "Your antagonist cannot fire, as his pistol is broken. I am entirely opposed to the continuation of this duel. We are two seconds here. It is our place to decide, and we both think alike, I'm sure of it."

As the general spoke, he darted an expressive glance at the serving-brother to induce him to sustain him. But the old trooper unfortunately was not of his opinion. This over scrupulous veteran shook his head and said : "The young fellow is right."

Encouraged by this expression of approval, Marcas began to bluster. "I am entirely right," said he, as he loaded his pistol, "and the proof of it is that if, while I fire, this gentleman can succeed in any way in firing the bullet still in his pistol at me, I shall be obliged to stand his fire, although I am not yet ready to receive it. It is even forbidden me to retreat, and I am at this moment, as you see, defenceless. I am waiting the fire. Fire if you can. Fire before I finish an operation which I wish to pay great attention to, for this is my last cartridge, and I don't wish to waste it."

While Octavie's lover talked in this jeering style, he pressed the charge vigorously with the ramrod in his hand. "These good-for-nothing horse pistols are so wide that the lead is never tight enough in the barrel," added he. "I press upon my charge as much as I can, to make my fire truer. Heaven knows whether I shall succeed ! It would be very disagreeable for me to lame this gentleman. Ah ! I have finished. I have only to see if the priming is in place."

And opening the fire-pan, he quietly began to examine the powder which he had poured into the little steel recipient, having a hole communicating with the barrel of the pistol. For many years past no one has used any but percussion arms, but every one knows that old pistols were made in such a way that a spark ignited by a flint set fire to the charge. Our ancestors had flint guns at Austerlitz, Jena, and Friedland. They could

hit a partridge as well as we can, and Fayot, the celebrated duellist, who never missed his man, knew nothing of the capsule pistol.

Marcas was not quite so good a shot as that dangerous marksman, but he wished to hit his adversary in the heart, and would not risk missing fire. While he was passing his nail along the edge of the flint in order to be sure that it was not damaged, Fabien stood with his head erect, as haughty and unmoved as he had been on the day when the platoon of execution had faced him. He had not even attempted to contest the right so ferociously demanded by Marcas, and when he saw Octavie's lover raise the weapon which he had just loaded, he contented himself with giving the general a nod and saying, calmly: "Farewell! avenge me!"

Fabien forgot that his uncle could not use the broken pistol any better than he could, that Marcas would refuse to fight with swords, and that to punish him for the crime he was about to commit in killing an unarmed man, it would be necessary to assassinate him. But the marquis remembered all this, and stepped forward, exclaiming: "Stop!"

Marcas turned towards him and said, quietly: "I must remark, sir, that we are losing precious time. If you must speak, speak quickly!"

The scoundrel thought himself sure of success; he held his enemy's life at his pistol's muzzle, and he took pleasure in prolonging the sufferings of his enemy who held him in contempt.

"You will not fire unless you are a coward," resumed M. de Brouage. "I propose to you to take this gentleman's place and to let fate decide which of us shall have the only weapon which is fit to use. Whoever wins shall blow out the brains of his adversary, close to the muzzle if you like."

"I accept," said Marcas. "We will fight as you say, but after I have done with this gentleman."

"Kill me first, then," said the general, placing himself in front of his nephew.

"I should be delighted, but it would be against our rules," sneered the student. "If I let you come first, this gentleman would have a right to object. So stand back, I beg, and let me fire! Time is going by, I repeat!"

And he added, lowering his voice, so that his words might not reach the ears of the serving-brother who was still leaning against the wall: "I don't wish to be hanged, and I presume that you don't care to be hanged either, and that is what will happen if the Brotherhood of the Coral Pin find you here, for there must be some among them who know you."

The old soldier did not hear this short and significant speech, but Fabien did not lose a word of it, and said to his uncle: "I agree with this gentleman and beg of you to stand back. I must stand his fire, and will do so. Don't fear for me. When a man fires upon a defenceless adversary, his hand trembles. This gentleman will not hit me."

And gently pushing the Marquis de Brouage from him, Fabien advanced and placed himself in such a manner as to offer the least possible surface to Marcas' fire.

His form was drawn aside, his arm bent, and holding his weapon in a horizontal position, as though it still could be of use to him, Fabien waited, with his cigar still between his teeth, but without blanching, for the expected shot. The general was livid with rage, but he understood that the resolution of his heroic nephew was irrevocable, so he no longer tried to screen him.

Marcas, however, did not hasten to fire. The viscount's sarcastic words

had stung him ; not that he blushed for his cowardice and cruelty, but because it reminded him of the care he needed to take in aiming at his foe. The combatants were now twenty paces apart, and Marcas wished to draw nearer in order to be more certain in his aim, so he began slowly to advance with the evident intention of only stopping when he reached the limit marked by the rope. This was still his right, and Fabien did not attempt to dispute it.

The viscount had resigned himself. The only chance that remained was that his enemy's bullet might once more encounter the same obstacle as before, and the broken pistol again play the part of a buckler. But this was so slight a chance that the viscount did not even think of it. In this trying moment Cecilia's image rose before him, and he collected his thoughts, so that at the last moment of his existence they might dwell upon the beloved woman whom he no longer hoped to behold again in this world.

Marcas was still coming towards him ; he had but three steps more to take to reach the point from which he intended to fire, and he felt sure of his aim. He was pale, his lips were compressed and his eye fiery ; his whole look was that of an executioner making ready for the final blow.

At this moment Heaven inspired Fabien with a happy thought. The marquis suddenly saw his nephew place his right hand upon the pistol which he held in his left, and with it turn the plate of the pan, which had not been touched by Marcas' bullet. The recipient was still full of powder. Marcas, who was watching the viscount, but did not guess his intention, said, with a sneering laugh : "You are not so defenceless as you pretend to be. If a spark from one of those torches fell upon the pistol that you are holding out to me, you could easily kill me."

"You are right," said the viscount, gravely. "I am going to kill you."

And with a promptitude and precision of movement which Octavie's lover had not calculated upon, Fabien took his cigar between his fingers and applied the lighted end to the powder in the pan. He had not ceased aiming for an instant. The shot went off, and the bullet struck Marcas in the right side. He tottered and fell, with his arms outspread and his face to the earth.

"He was right," said the serving-brother. "A pistol without a cock can go off just the same and kill a man."

This singular funeral discourse was premature. Marcas was not dead. He rose up, supporting himself by his hands, and said in a stifled voice : "Yes, you have killed me, but I still have the strength to fire, and the right to fire."

Bloody foam was trickling from his mouth ; his face was growing gradually more ghastly, but his eyes still sparkled. All his remaining life was centred in those eyes. "Where is my pistol ? give it to me," gasped the villain, stretching out his hand to clutch hold of the weapon which had escaped him as he fell. It was too far off for him to reach it.

"Brother, help me to avenge myself," said Marcas to the old soldier.

"You forget that I have sworn not to help any one of you," coldly replied the Carbonaro. "Fire if you can. Your antagonist has not stirred."

This was true. Fabien had crossed his arms and was calmly waiting. Octavie's lover gave a cry of rage, and a frightful scene now followed. The scoundrel tried to drag himself towards the spot where the pistol lay. He crawled along like a bruised serpent, staining the ground with the blood that flowed from his wound, and writhing with agony.

"We cannot suffer him to die like this," murmured Fabien.

He had thrown away his pistol and the cigar with which he had set fire to the powder, and he averted his head in order not to behold the horrible sight before him.

"He killed Henri," answered the general.

"He would not have spared you," said the serving-brother. "Why should we have pity upon him?"

But Marcas had now succeeded in clutching hold of his pistol, and was trying to raise himself up.

"Viscount," he muttered, "I am going to shoot you in the heart. You will be at the death-rattle presently. Wait—let me but take aim—but no—no—my eyes fail me. I cannot. Shall he escape me. I won't have him escape—he must not live—" And with a final effort he managed to call out to the old soldier: "Brother—he has deceived you—the old man whom he brought with him—is his uncle—the Marquis de Brouage, who will denounce you all if you let him leave this place—these two men are traitors!"

"Traitors here! Where are they?" cried a voice which made Fabien start.

Marcas did not hear it, although it rang through the vault. His powerless hand had let the pistol fall, he sank once more upon the bloody soil of the cellar, his limbs stiffened in a final convulsion, and he remained thus with outspread arms, his eyes open and his features distorted. He was dead, and yet he still seemed to threaten the enemy whom he had failed to kill.

Fabien and his witnesses, bending over the body, had their backs turned to the entrance of the vault. They had not seen a number of men in black who had paused in amazement on the threshold on beholding a group when they had expected to find the serving-brother alone. The new-comers were the delegates of the *ventas* called together to try Marcas. Fabien had forgotten the hour. Midnight had just struck. He remembered, too late, that the Carbonari were always punctual to the very minute, and he saw that he must now deal with them. It was not as regarded himself that he feared them. But it would be necessary to explain his uncle's presence, and to say why he had brought the Marquis de Brouage to the most secret meeting-place of the brethren of the Coral Pin Association.

Fabien had succeeded in deceiving a subordinate, a mere lamp-lighter, who would not have presumed to doubt the assertions of a superior. He did not hope to succeed so easily with the chiefs, who did not listen to idle words, and would certainly demand an explanation. A dead body lying upon the floor, and a man who did not belong to the society, who was a stranger to their mysteries—this must necessarily excite their curiosity and mistrust. Fabien would be questioned, and he already prepared to answer.

He still had some slight hope of arranging matters by a pious falsehood which would protect M. de Brouage. The conspirators did not all know one another. In accordance with a fundamental principle of the dangerous sect which had been imported into France by the Prince of Catanzaro, the private bodies designated under the name of *ventas* communicated with one another by a single delegate, and the members without special rank had no relations with those of other *ventas*. Fabien might thus present the general as a brother, and justify his presence by repeating the more or less plausible story which he had told the veteran. He held to this hazardous means for want of any other, and he thought it best to go towards the brethren and to anticipate their questions. Hastening to them he said in a voice which

slightly trembled: "I have executed your sentence before it was pronounced. I have killed this Marcas, who was about to betray our secrets."

"You have killed him in a duel, it appears," said a tall man with a dignified countenance, whom Fabien had seen once before.

It was the Carbonaro who had played the part of president at the spurious court-martial before which the Viscount de Brouage had been arraigned one night in March. He was accompanied by ten brethren with stern countenances, and wearing long black coats. Colonel Fournès was not one of the party, and Fabien rejoiced that this was the case, for Fournès had formerly been under the general's command, and knew his old companion in arms very well. "This man ought not to have died in this manner," said the president.

"What does it matter whether he died by a bullet or a rope?" replied Fabien. "He can no longer injure our cause."

"That is true, but the fear of death would have made him confess. Traitors are always cowards. He would have told us the projects of the spies with whom he associated, whereas now we shall learn nothing. Why did you anticipate our act of justice? How is it that Marcas, who was to have been brought here this evening by four of our brethren, who were ordered to arrest him, came here with you?"

"And with one of my friends who has helped me. Well, we had private grievances against him, and I was not aware that he was to be tried to-night, although, like you, I had been summoned to the assembly of delegates. We succeeded in inducing him to follow us and give us satisfaction."

"How did you enter this place? Had you a key of the garden?"

Fabien did not know what to reply. He saw that he was going astray in his attempt at hazardous explanations, and that the person questioning him was determined to learn everything.

"You say nothing?" resumed the Carbonaro. "I am now going to question your friend, who will doubtless be less reticent. He is one of us, I presume?"

"Yes," replied Fabien.

While this dialogue was going on near the entrance of the vault, the general had remained leaning against the wall, anxiously awaiting its termination. He clearly understood the situation, and did not hide from himself that his position was a perilous one—marquis as he was, and a peer of France, surprised in a conspirators' meeting place. He had come into the lion's den, and the lion having appeared, it was now necessary to try and get away without being devoured. Meantime, he kept up an appearance of unconcern, and did not even notice the angry looks of the old trooper, who had been put on his guard by the last words which Marcas had uttered. The ex-chasseur of the imperial guard knew now that the pretended brother brought by Fabien was in reality a great royalist nobleman, a sworn foe of the Carbonari, and he longed to denounce him to his superiors. He did not need to do so, however. The president of the sham council of war stepped forward and recognized the general, whom he had seen several times at reviews, and at the Chamber of Peers. "You have deceived me," said he to Fabien. "There is more than one traitor here, and the wretch whom you have slain did not speak falsely. I heard only the last words that he gasped before he expired, but I now know what they meant. Come near, brethren," he added, addressing the Carbonari, who were following him, and who immediately formed a circle round him; "come forward and look at the man whom the delegate of one of our *ventas* has dared to bring here.

Do you know who he is? He is one of our bitterest and most powerful foes. He is General de Brouage, once a victorious soldier of Napoleon, and now a peer under Louis XVIII. What has this renegade come to do here? He has come to spy upon our mysteries and to—"

"I forbid you to insult me!" exclaimed the ex-colonel of dragoons. "I am the Marquis de Brouage, and I hate you and all like you, but I am neither a spy nor a traitor."

"Listen to me," cried Fabien. "I told you that we had reasons to avenge ourselves upon Marcas. This is the truth. My uncle had to avenge his son, whom Marcas killed in an unfair duel, I had to avenge my brother whom he had grievously wounded; we followed him to this place, and we were unaware that the brethren of the Association were about to meet in this vault. My uncle was even unaware that the buildings of the old Com-manderie du Temple were used by us, or that I was one of you—"

"He now knows all that," interrupted the conspirator; "he has possession of our secrets, and any man who knows our secrets and does not belong to us must die."

"Yes, yes, death!" exclaimed all the delegates in one breath.

The general crossed his arms and, without condescending to reply to the cries, waited for the death with which these furious men threatened him.

"Kill me also, then," cried Fabien, "for I did everything. I brought the general here, and I have just told you why. I lied just now. I should have been wiser in confessing the truth, and relying upon your justice. You all know me. Who of you dares assert that I am a traitor?" And as no one replied, he resumed passionately: "Well, then, I answer with my life for General de Brouage. If he denounces us I will return and give myself up to you. But he will be silent. He hears me and does not contradict me. You cannot accuse him of being afraid of death. You know very well that if he intended to betray you he would say so openly. You know very well that a brave soldier like he is would not make himself an accomplice of the police."

These words, warmly articulated, seemed to make an impression upon the Carbonari. They stood somewhat back, and their chief conferred with them. The serving-brother went to pick up the rope which he had prepared for Marcas, and which might now serve another purpose.

Fabien did not attempt to approach his uncle, who waited, calm and haughty, for this deliberation upon which his life depended to come to a close. Fabien knew the general's indomitable character, and advisedly refrained from asking him to ratify the promise which he had made in his name.

The council did not last long. The circle opened, and the president came towards the general, saying: "The high *venta* alone has the right to decide as to your fate. A person who represents it is about to come here. We consent to wait for him, out of respect for your past life as a brave soldier and the services which Brother Fabien has rendered to our cause. The supreme judge will perhaps consent to give you your life, providing you will give him your word of honour that you will not betray us."

"I will not give my word of honour to the enemies of the King," replied the proud nobleman. "It is not my place to swear, it is yours to believe the assurances of the Viscount de Brouage."

"Let him die, then!" exclaimed the conspirators.

"The assurances of Brother Fabien are not enough for us," replied the chief; "he himself is accused, and cannot answer for you."

"I will answer for him," said a man, who now made way for himself among the brethren pressing round the general.

This man had entered the vault without being noticed, and had succeeded in approaching the group without attracting its attention. The conspirators were too much absorbed to notice what was going on behind them. The new comer's appearance was startling in its effect on one and all. "Colonel Fournès!" exclaimed the Carbonari.

"I listened," said the colonel, "and I know enough of what has occurred to settle the question. Monsieur de Brouage saved my life when I was accused of having taken part in the conspiracy of 1816. Monsieur de Brouage will not denounce us. I take upon myself to restore him to liberty." And bowing to the marquis, with as much courtesy as though they had met in a drawing-room, he said to him: "General, if you will follow me, I shall have the honour of escorting you to the limits of our territory. Come, my dear Fabien," he added.

Colonel Fournès, as a member of the high *venta*, had absolute authority over such brethren of the Coral Pin Association as were present. Not one of them dared to contradict him, and neither M. de Brouage nor the viscount made any difficulty about obeying his wishes. They all three proceeded to the garden, and when they had reached it, Fabien wished to thank the colonel, but at the first words he spoke the latter interrupted him. "You owe me no gratitude," said he, quickly. "If I had thought that you were a traitor, or that General de Brouage was capable of betraying us, you would not have left the vaults alive. I believe in his honour as I do in yours, and I have not forgotten that I served under his orders in the 9th Dragoons."

The general was greatly moved, and was about to hold out his hand to his old comrade. But Fournès undoubtedly wished to remain on the defensive with the political adversary whom he had just rescued, for he prevented all sentiment by saying: "Here is the door by which you came. I feel sure that no one will ever know through you what has taken place here to-night. Farewell!"

And, thereupon, he hastily returned to the vaults. The uncle and nephew had been too much perturbed to speak to one another in the garden, but when they had gone out by the little door which the colonel had opened, and closed after them, M. de Brouage took both of Fabien's hands in his, and said to him, with great emotion: "I had no son, I have one now."

"You have two!" exclaimed Fabien. "For I am sure that you have forgiven René."

XXV.

THE little house which Cecilia d'Ascoli occupied in the Faubourg du Roule was separated from the street by a wall which screened it from prying eyes. The passers-by, seeing merely this wall and a closed gate-way, might presume that this residence of stylish aspect was unoccupied, for at this season Parisian Society was at Vichy, Dieppe, or the Pyrenees. The house was reached by crossing a courtyard in which the grass grew between the paving-stones, but its principal frontage was upon a garden full of flowers and shade. The stir of the city did not reach this retreat; it was delightfully cool during the hot days of summer, and the young woman who had sought refuge there would not have regretted the pavilion in the Rue du Rocher, had she not been alone with her sorrow.

One evening in June, at the hour of sunset, she had seated herself near a window girt round with fragrant clematis, the window of a conservatory which communicated with the garden. From the spot where she sat dreaming, she had merely to put out her hand to gather roses, and she could hear the birds singing in the foliage around her. But she thought neither of the roses nor the fauvets. Her eyes were wandering over the golden clouds which had gathered in the west. She seemed to be seeking an absent face among them.

She had not taken off her mask, the black velvet mask which she had worn ever since that fatal night on which she had sacrificed her beauty to Orso. The long white dress which she wore hid her neck and shoulders. Only her aristocratic hands and flaming eyes were visible. She had long been suffering and waiting. She had entreated Fabien to grant her ten days' delay. The tenth day had come, and was now expiring. Orso had given no sign of life, and Fabien had not appeared; and Cecilia, although she no longer hoped to see Orso, wished that Fabien might not come. And yet she loved him. She felt that her heart was his, and still she struggled against its promptings. She could not forget that she had pledged her faith to the ungrateful man who thus abandoned her, that she bore his name, and that the treachery of the Prince of Catanzaro did not free Cecilia d'Ascoli from her oath.

She had done all that she could to bring him back to her. She had written to him, signing a false name, and implored him to pity her, asking him in mercy to let her know that he did not repudiate her, but still remembered her. There had been no reply. One night, with a veil so arranged as to hide her mask, she had, at the risk of compromising him, and ruining herself, called at the house where he lived. She had been told there that Monsieur Hernandez was travelling, that no one knew where he had gone, or when he would return. His servants had gone with him at least those whom she knew. The Italians, who had scattered in different directions on leaving the house in the Rue de Monsieur, had also vanished. Teresa, the faithful maid, no longer met them anywhere, and she told her mistress that there was a talk all over Paris of the police being on the track of foreign conspirators. Thus everything seemed to indicate that the grand-master of the Coral Pin Association had been obliged to fly in haste, but this supposition did not explain the utter absence of all news of him.

Cecilia sometimes said to herself that he must be dead, and that she would never know whether she was indeed a widow. The only friend that remained to her in the world was the one exiled at the farm at Brouage, and she was certainly ignorant of what was going on far from Saintonge. Orso had forbidden Cecilia to correspond with her, and Cecilia had never ventured to act contrary to this injunction, though it caused her great pain.

However she now thought of joining Francesca Ranese, and leaving France with her. She even came near going to Brouage without letting Fabien, who wished to take her there, know of her intention, for she dreaded the interview which she had promised him. She trembled at the thought of not retaining sufficient command over herself to refuse the happiness offered her by the only man who had the courage to love her after her disfigurement. The impassioned scene which had followed the tumult in which she had almost lost her life was ever present in her mind. She thought she could still feel Fabien's rapturous embrace, and hear his voice swearing that he adored her, and was ready to give his life to her. And

she said to herself that his love must be ardent indeed, to outlive the beauty of the woman who had inspired it.

In the vehicle to which he had carried Cecilia when he had rescued her from death, Fabien had cut the ribbons which held the mask, and had not recoiled at the sight of her face scarred by the poisonous lotion. Would she have the courage to repel him when she saw him at her feet, when he entreated her to fly with him? She doubted it, and yet she felt that it would be cruel of her to repulse him, and that he would have a right to curse her if she did not keep her promise, but departed for ever without seeing him. He had kept his promise though he was such an ardent lover, and whatever it might have cost him, he had not appeared before her during the ten days that had just passed. He must be dying with impatience to behold her, but he had had the strength to wait.

Cecilia could not treat such abnegation with indifference, and after long hesitation she had decided to receive Fabien. But she had also resolved that after receiving him she would exact another proof of his love. She had made up her mind to go to Brouage, but with her maid alone. At Brouage she would find the baroness, tell her what had occurred, and start with her for England. In London, it would be easier to learn something of Orso. Fabien could not long remain ignorant of the fate of the leader of the conspiracy, and Cecilia did not intend to forbid his coming in person to acquaint her with what had befallen the grandmaster of the Coral Pin Association.

Across the channel, on the English soil where she need no longer hide herself, she wished to show herself to him with her face uncovered, not by the doubtful light of a coach lamp, as before, but in broad daylight. She wished to throw off for ever that hateful mask, and brave people's repugnance and remark; and after having made this perilous effort, she would ask Fabien if he still had the courage to love her, and brave the world to which the victim of Orso's jealousy must be an object of perfect horror.

Nothing opposed the execution of this plan. She possessed sufficient money to enable her to live abroad in quiet comfort. Paris no longer disturbed itself about her. Everything is soon forgotten there. The woman with the death's-head having ceased to show herself, the papers contained no more absurd stories about her; fortune-hunters had grown weary of being shown the door when they called at her house. The police no longer kept its eye upon the young lady in the marriage-market, whose arrival had caused such excitement three months before, and the Prefect would certainly not refuse to *viser* for England, the passport which the Prince of Catanzaro had formerly procured for her.

Cecilia had nothing to conceal from her dear Teresa, to whom she always confided everything. She bade her prepare everything for a prompt departure, and to usher in the Viscount de Brouage as soon as he presented himself. She thought that he would probably come in the evening, in order to avoid being seen by the neighbours, and at dusk she seated herself in the conservatory, which looked out upon the garden. This conservatory was full of choice plants, but it was furnished like a boudoir.

The house belonged to a celebrated actress, now absent on an engagement in Russia, and who had let her mansion furnished at a high figure while earning rubles enough to return and live in Paris permanently. She had placed divans and mirrors everywhere.

The maid had received orders to take Fabien to the flowery parterre behind the house, and to remain in the drawing-room on the ground floor during the interview. Gennaro, the Italian man-servant whom the prince

had left to wait upon Cecilia, and who habitually answered the bell, had gone out to make some purchases necessitated by the coming journey.

Night was coming on; the last rays of the setting sun were still gilding the tops of the acacias planted here and there among the rose-bushes, but the conservatory was growing dim. Cecilia dreaded that twilight so dear to lovers, the hour when all around them becomes still, when Venus—"the shepherd's star"—shines on the horizon, bedimmed somewhat by the mists of eve. She rose up and went to light the candles in two sconces of gilded bronze fixed to the wall beside a large Venetian mirror. Teresa had foreseen that Cecilia would probably wish to light up the conservatory without ringing, and had taken care to place what she might require upon a side table.

The mirror reflected the form of the unfortunate woman who, when still beautiful had been called Stella Negroni. Cecilia saw herself in her white dress, like a corpse in a shroud, caught a glimpse of the horrible mask, and felt frightened. Since the poisonous lotion had done its work, she avoided looking in a glass, even though she wore the gloomy covering which hid her disfigurement. She only removed this mask when retiring for the night, and in order not to see herself when she awoke, she had had all the mirrors in her bed-room and dressing-room removed. She attended to all that was necessary in her toilet as far as her face was concerned, and when Teresa came to dress her mistress, she invariably found her with the mask covering her features.

Cecilia had taken a vow in her own mind that she would never allow any one to behold the ruin of her beauty, and that she herself would never look upon the horrible sight. She had so far kept her vow, but that evening a strange temptation came to her. Her life was about to change. Fabien was coming, and she wished to subject him to a final and dangerous trial.

"Why prolong my punishment and his?" she said. "Why encourage him to follow me? why let him believe that I will suffer him to love me if I am disfigured to such a degree that he would recoil with horror at sight of me; for he has not seen me as he believes; his imagination evoked the remembrance of my vanished beauty; I appeared to him for an instant like a dream that flits by and is gone at daylight, and when he sees my scarred features in the full light, when a hideous reality banishes that dream, nought will be left to me but to die of shame and despair! No, no; I do not wish that he should curse me!" And thereupon she raised her hand to untie the ribbons of the mask, but it fell again.

"Ah!" she murmured, "I feel that I lack the courage to look at myself. Who knows what that burning lotion may have done? Has it made furrows upon my cheeks? Has it destroyed my features? I remember the man whom his mistress disfigured and who was shown to me at Lanziano when I was a child—he frightened me. And the poison that burned his face is the same which I wrested from Orso's hand and applied to my own—and yet I did not suffer—I did not feel anything burn my face, or eat into my flesh. What if I should be mistaken? No, it is impossible—Orso would have told me. He would not have hastily procured me this mask, or have made me swear to hide my face even from Teresa's eyes. He knows that I am frightful to behold; he knows it, and that is why he comes to me no more."

She shuddered from head to foot at the thought of beholding her own face, and yet she still stood before the mirror. The masked phantom reflected in the mirror fascinated her. "The Parisians have given me a nick-

name," she said, suddenly. "They call me the woman with the death's head. I will see whether I am really frightful enough to deserve that name." And she abruptly suddenly raised her hand to the mask.

She was indeed about to tear it off when she heard the sound of a man's footstep on the gravel of the garden path. She turned quickly. Fabien was before her.

Cecilia had expected him, and yet she uttered a cry of terror, and forgetting that she was masked, raised her hands to her head. She was in fact so troubled that she imagined he had found her with her face uncovered, and she tried to hide it. Fabien ran towards her, thinking that she was about to faint, and making ready to take her in his arms, but she quickly recovered and gently repulsed him.

"What ails you?" he asked.

"Nothing," she murmured. "I did not know that you were there, and on seeing you appear so suddenly I was startled."

"But you expected me—the delay which you insisted upon has expired."

"Yes, I know it, and I was longing to see you."

"Is it true? Ah! your impatience could not equal mine, for you cannot love me as I love you—it seemed to me that the longed-for day would never come. It has come at last, however, and it will be our first day of happiness, for we shall part no more. We will leave this city which has grown so hateful to me."

"I am going away, but alone."

"Alone! is that what you promised me?"

"I promised to receive you and speak openly to you. I am keeping my promise. Listen to me, I beg of you, and you will understand why I wish that we should again part."

"For ever?"

"For a short time only. I am going to London. You may come to me there. And in order that you may not doubt my words, I will tell you that I am first going to Brouage to fetch Francesca."

"You will not find her there."

"What do you tell me! Has anything happened to her?"

"Francesca has embarked upon the vessel which was to have taken the barrels of gold away. She miraculously escaped from our enemies—but the treasure of the Carbonari has fallen into their hands. We have been betrayed; one of the brethren arrived this morning from Saintonge—a member who was present at the disaster, and narrowly escaped arrest. An alarm has been given, and all the police are afoot. The leaders of the Coral Pin Association must fly, if indeed there still be time."

"What! is your life threatened?"

"My life, or at least my liberty, is in danger. If I remained in France I should certainly be arrested. Do you understand now why I wish to leave? Fortunately, I can do so. I had foreseen that matters might end like this, and had taken my precautions, so in twenty-four hours I can cross the frontier."

"Yes, yes, fly! fly!" exclaimed the young woman, in terror.

"Not without you," replied Fabien, eagerly.

"Why not! Every moment that passes by is precious. I am not ready to start, and I have nothing to fear. Fly! I tell you, fly!"

"You are mistaken, you will be searched for. Stella Negroni has not been forgotten; some coward may betray you to save himself."

"What does that matter to me? The life that awaits me is not worth the trouble of disputing it with our persecutors."

"But happiness awaits you, a lasting happiness if you will consent to let me love you. We will live for each other, far from the meaningless stir of the world; not in that foggy England where flowers and lovers alike lack the sunlight, not there, but in Italy, in Spain, in the East—we shall find a blessed spot somewhere, and a sky forever clear, where we shall not hear the idle noise of mankind, but live alone."

"It is a dream, a mere dream that will never be realised."

"It depends upon you to make it a reality at once. What keeps you in this accursed city where you have suffered so much?" Cecilia hung her head and did not reply. "Ah!" continued Fabien, bitterly, "I can guess. You are still thinking of the man who has made you suffer so much. You hesitate to leave this man who has not hesitated to leave you."

"He is proscribed," murmured the young woman.

"I also am proscribed, and I am not thinking of hiding myself. I only think of you. He is hiding, and it is because he is afraid of being arrested that he has deserted you."

"No, no; for himself he has no fear. It is to the cause you both serve that he has sacrificed me."

"You sacrificed yourself for him!"

"I did my duty, and must still do it."

"You love him, then?"

"I belong to him."

"What right has he over you then?"

"It is time that you should know. I am his wife."

"His wife!"

"You thought that I was his mistress, no doubt? He forbade my telling any one that we were lawfully married. But the time has come for my confession. I am the daughter of an impoverished nobleman, and I was chosen by the man whom you accuse. I have been Princess of Catanzaro, Duchess of Corleoue, and Marchioness of Alcamo for six years. I bear the name and title of the generous nobleman who never loved aught save myself and his country."

"His country before you, a thousand times more than you, for he is ready to die for her sake, and he lets you die for his. What has he done that you should keep faith with him? What does it matter if he has given you a duchess's coronet? He is but an egotist, who merely associated you with his fortunes to make you serve his projects. He might have made you a queen, and yet he would not deserve your gratitude, and if you speak of his pretended benefactions to explain your fidelity, it is because you dare not confess the truth, you dare not tell me that your heart is his. I ought to have guessed it, for I knew very well that women only love those who torture them."

Cecilia started. Since Fabien had been with her she had been struggling against the love which drew her towards him, and trying to take refuge in the past as in an impregnable fortress. "I have sworn," said she, in a stifled tone. "Death alone can free me from my oath."

"Death! If you were a widow you would not repulse me. You would be mine forever."

"I should be free."

"You shall be freed, you are, perhaps, already free. Orso has disappeared, the other chiefs of the Coral Pin Association have been vainly

searching for him ; he disappeared at the very hour when his brethren needed him the most, at the hour when his absence might imperil their cause—and Orso is neither a coward nor a traitor. If he has vanished in this manner, it must be that he is dead.”

“It is impossible ! You would know if it were so.”

“How should I know it ? May he not have died in some obscure struggle with the men who are on his track ? If they have killed him they have every interest in concealing the murder of an illustrious personage, the near relative of a Spanish grandee. They would not wish it to be said that a prince, even a foreign prince, has been conspiring against the Bourbon government. Colonel Fournès, who is his friend and his principal supporter is convinced as well as myself that the Coral Pin Brotherhood has now no leader left. Orso has, perhaps, not cared to survive the ruin of his hopes. Suicide is the last resource of the defeated.”

“Suicide ! kill himself without seeing me again, without bidding me farewell—that would be horrible.”

“I also am defeated,” resumed Fabien, with a gesture of despair, “and I should soon end my life if I had to renounce you. Speak, I am waiting your sentence. What is it ? I am ready to obey it, and this time you may be twice a widow ; the widow of the man you love, and of the man who loves you.”

“Who believes that he loves me,” said Cecilia.

“You doubt my love ? What must I do to prove it ?”

“You love Stella Negroni, and she has ceased to exist. You love her vanished beauty ; you love a phantom ; you do not love the disfigured Cecilia. You may in a passing transport forget that I am hideous, because you do not see me.”

“I have seen you ; it is you who forget that I held you in my arms, fainting and unmasked, as you then were, that I inhaled your breath, and that when you revived you heard my voice telling you that I adored you.”

“You caught a glimpse of my features, and they seemed to you the same as before. Your imagination called up a false image. I tell you that the lotion burned my face, and left frightful traces, I tell you that Stella is dead. Your love, however ardent it may be, cannot resuscitate her, and it would vanish if you saw her as she now is.”

Fabien wished to protest, but she resumed in a firm tone : “Listen to me. The hours that remain to us are few, and my resolution is irrevocable. I shall leave Paris to-morrow, alone, and as Francesca is no longer at Brouage I shall go straight to London. I do not forbid your joining me there, and you will see me then, if you dare to look at me. I have not dared to look at myself. Twenty times have I wished to unmask myself, and my courage has always failed me. You must forgive me, I am but a woman, and have all a woman’s weaknesses. I am afraid to look at my own face. Still I do not wish to continue such a life, and have made up my mind to overcome the repugnance which I have so far failed to conquer. As long as I am upon French soil I shall not unmask myself. The eye of some spy might recognize Stella Negroni in me. But in England I will throw aside the veil which hides me from myself. Heaven will give me strength to bear my misfortunes. And then, but then only you will know whether the passion inspired by a human being can outlive her beauty.”

“It is a trial, then ; why not subject me to it now ? Take off that mask, and if, when you do so, I do not fall at your feet and swear that I love you more than ever, drive me from you, forbid me ever to appear before

you again. I will consent, but do not again accuse me of lying, do not delay allowing me to live for you alone."

"The day on which you behold me will destroy my last illusion."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You do not understand, then, that I am trying to deceive myself, to prolong a situation which leaves me yet a remnant of hope, a semblance of happiness? You do not realise that I fear the terrible moment when you will avert your gaze at sight of me, and that if I still wear my black mask, it is because I feel sure that in spite of your entreaties, you would, if I consented, feel nothing but pity for me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Fabien, "you love me, then, since you fear that I may cease to love you? You will consent to be mine?"

"I may love you, but I cannot be yours."

"Because you belong to Orso? No, you do not belong to him now, for he is dead. I shall soon be able to prove it to you, and even did he live, the brethren would condemn and execute him, for he has deserted them as he has you."

"Are you sure of that?" asked a voice, which went straight to the heart of Cecilia.

She was standing before the Venetian mirror, side by side with Fabien, and like him, with her back to the garden. Night had come on, there was no moon, and all was dark without. The two lovers saw nothing but a dark form on the threshold. Fabien darted forward threateningly, but stopped on recognising the new comer, who had appeared as unexpectedly as Banquo's ghost at Macbeth's feast.

"Hernandez!" exclaimed the viscount.

"Yes," coldly replied the Prince of Catanzaro. "Hernandez, the leader of the Coral Pin Brotherhood, Hernandez whom you swore to obey, but whom you slander after having betrayed him."

Cecilia in her terror remained speechless, but Fabien was not a man to allow himself to be intimidated, and he seized upon the occasion to quarrel with his formidable rival. "You insult me, sir!" he exclaimed, hotly. "You shall pay dearly for your insults!"

"You know very well that a duel is impossible between us," replied Orso, without any apparent emotion.

"Why? Because you are a prince? I am a nobleman. That is enough!"

"Because I am the head of the Carbonari. A leader does not fight with one of his subordinates. Cease idle talking and listen to the orders I am now about to give you."

"Orders! to me!"

"Yes, and I rely upon your obedience, for you are bound by an oath to obey me."

"In all that regards the Association, but in naught beside."

"I am speaking to you as a Carbonaro."

"And it is to the Prince of Catanzaro that I reply. Do you think the time and place are well chosen to exercise your authority as grand-master?"

"I have not chosen either the time or place. You know, as well as I do, what is now going on. Our treasure has been seized, our Association has been betrayed. We have nothing left but flight. To-morrow, no doubt, you will have left France. I wished to see you before your departure."

"And came to seek me here?"

"I did not seek you here, but I am not surprised at finding you here."

"Monsieur de Brouage came here to tell me of the misfortune which has befallen all of us," said Cecilia with an effort. "He came offering to help me to fly."

"Spare yourself a falsehood, madame," interrupted Orso. "I have heard everything."

"You were there?"

"Yes, I was there. You had doubtless forgotten that I kept a key of the private door to this house. If you had remembered it, you would undoubtedly have taken better precautions. I was able to cross the courtyard, enter the garden and reach this window without meeting any one. You took care to send your servants away."

"Then, sir, you have been spying upon us," cried Fabien, "listening at the door like a lackey!"

"I have found you in my house where you have no right to be. I had the right to ascertain why you came to see the Princess of Catanzaro. I now know your errand."

"Well, then, you must know that one of us must die. I am ready to fight with you on your own conditions."

"I repeat that there can be no duel between us. If I had not met you here, I should have gone to your rooms to-night to tell you of matters which it is important you should know in the interest of the brotherhood. You alone, perhaps, among the leaders of the Coral Pin Association, will not be arrested. Your uncle, who is a French peer, will protect you, because you bear his name, and also on account of the great service which you rendered him the other night in the Convent of the Temple."

"What! you have been told—"

"I have seen Colonel Fournès. He is by this time already out of France, and will not return for a long time. The members of the high *renta* have some of them fled, and the rest will be obliged to keep in the background for prudence sake. It is to you, therefore, that I must give my instructions to secure the future triumph of our cause."

"What reason have you for thinking that I shall continue to serve it?"

"I am at least certain that you will not betray it, and that if you abandon it, you will transmit to one of the brethren the powers and the papers which will be handed to you to-morrow by an Italian, who has always served me faithfully. These papers contain instructions, which will enable my successors to resume the interrupted work."

"Your successors? Do you abdicate then?"

"Listen and do not interrupt me. The revolts which we had prepared have failed through the cowardice of certain leaders, but the future is ours. The year 1822 will see the dawn of liberty in France and Italy. Whether you still be one of us when that great day arrives, or whether you cease from this moment to fight on our side, I exact but one thing from you, it is to remain in Paris until you have fulfilled the mission I now give you."

"I guess your purpose," said the viscount bitterly. "You are afraid that I also shall go to England. What you wish is to impose a separation—"

"You are mistaken. The Princess of Catanzaro will start for England to-morrow. A post-chaise will come at dawn to take her to Calais. Nothing prevents you from going wherever you may please to go, as soon as your duty is fulfilled, that is to say, when you have handed the deposit which I shall temporarily confide to you to Brother Lormier for instance."

"Why do you not give it to him yourself?"

"Because I shall not see him again."

"The princess will start alone, then?"

"With Teresa. She will find Francesca Ranese in London."

A profound silence followed this reply, which neither Fabien nor Cecilia had foreseen. Fabien was anxious and angry, for he did not understand his rival's purpose. Cecilia was trembling, and bowed down before the judge who was about to decide her fate. Orso now knew that she loved another man. He had heard the avowal which had escaped her lips. She prayed that Heaven's lightning might strike her to spare her the shame of replying to the terrible questions of her outraged husband. She did not dare raise her eyes, but she felt those of the prince upon her, and her blood froze in her veins. And when Orso's voice called her by name, she fell upon her knees, held out her hands entreatingly, and murmured: "Kill me! I would gladly die to expiate the wrong that I have done you."

Fabien was about to throw himself between her and her husband, but the prince raised Cecilia so quickly, and his face assumed an expression at once so grave and so mild, that his young rival remained mute and motionless. "Kill you!" said Orso slowly. "You do not realise then that I have already forgiven you? Why should I kill you? If you are in fault I also am guilty. I had forgotten that you were a woman, and that your heart is not made of bronze. I thought that you would be strong against loneliness. I ought to have known that absence kills love, and that you would accuse me of sacrificing you to my earnest wish to free my country."

"I did not accuse you. I wept for you, for it seemed that you were lost to me, and I sought for you everywhere. Ah! what effort did I leave untried to see you! But a few days ago—"

"You went to my house at the risk of delivering yourself over to our enemies. I myself had been obliged to leave Paris to organize the revolution in the east of France, and everybody was ignorant of my whereabouts. My most faithful men had followed me, and they will not return. They have crossed the frontier. But I did not wish to leave you alone and unprotected. I came back in order to arrange everything for your flight. I should perhaps have done better had I stayed away."

"You had not forgotten me, then? I was not an object of horror to you?"

"Never had I loved you so passionately," replied the prince in a voice full of emotion.

Cecilia started and hung her head. Fabien, pale and with blazing eyes and set teeth, could hardly restrain himself.

"How could you think that my love had changed so soon?" resumed Orso. "Since the day on which I pledged you my faith, when I swore to consecrate my life to you, have I not proved sufficiently that I have never ceased to worship you?"

"You loved me when I was beautiful," murmured the young woman. "I believed that I could no longer inspire you with aught but compassion; I believed that the mere thought of beholding me as I now am made you shudder, and that you had over-estimated your courage in accepting the sacrifice of my beauty. Ah! you did right when you tried to deter me from a resolution which was to cost me your love."

It was Orso's turn to look pale. "And so," he asked, "you thought that I was ungrateful enough to desert you after you had had the heroism to disfigure yourself?"

"Alas! I did not reproach you with anything, but I cursed my own folly."

"You have never seen your own face, then, since you began to wear this mask?"

"No. I feared that I might die of shame and despair if I did so. This mask, you know that it was I who desired to wear it to hide the ravages of the poison from myself."

"Has no one else seen your face?"

Cecilia hesitated an instant, but had the courage to reply: "I will not soil my lips by a falsehood. A man has seen it."

"A man!" repeated the prince, looking at Fabien.

"He had saved my life. I came near being crushed in a crowd. I had fainted, and was stifling. He tore off this mask, and for a few seconds he saw my face."

"And did not recoil with horror?" said Orso, with bitter irony. "And no doubt he swore that your ugliness would not prevent him from loving you? So much self-sacrifice touched you, did it not?"

"Oh! do not overwhelm me!" said Cecilia.

"I forbid your speaking thus," exclaimed Fabien, walking towards the prince with a threatening air.

Orso repelled him, drew out the stiletto which he always carried about him, made a step towards the weeping woman, and with one cut severed the ribbons of the black mask, which fell to the floor. Cecilia uttered a cry, which was repeated by Fabien. By the brilliant light of the candles, reflected by the mirror, she had caught sight of her face, pale with grief, but as beautiful as formerly.

"I pretended to consent to what you asked," said Orso, gravely, "but I should have committed a crime had I destroyed the work of Heaven."

"Then," stammered the young woman in bewilderment, "the poison—"

"One of the vials in the handle of this dagger, and but one, contains a poison. It was not the one you held. During that fatal night I thought of profiting by your generous proposal to frustrate the pursuit of our enemies. The project could not succeed unless you yourself were for a time deceived. It was necessary that you should believe that you were no longer beautiful. I did not foresee that you would always believe it. I thought that you would soon wish to see your face. I did not remember that you are unlike other women. And I also thought that the physician who was appointed to examine the foreigner with the 'death's head' would tell you the truth. He was one of the brethren of the Coral Pin. I knew that he would keep the secret from strangers, but I did not foresee that he would be so reticent with you."

"I did not dare to question him."

"Heaven has been against me. I do not complain. With my own hands I built up the edifice now crumbling. It is just that I should be crushed beneath its ruins."

"No, no, I alone am guilty and deserve to die."

"You, poor child! you to whom I promised happiness, and whom I have driven to despair! No, you shall not die, you shall not be condemned to share the fate of a proscribed man."

"I am ready to follow you."

"I know that you are, Cecilia; I know that you are high-minded enough to go on to the end with your self-sacrifice; but I also know that you no longer love me, but love another; and he, whom you love, spoke the truth when he said that there was one of us too many on this earth. It is I who am one too many," added Orso, pressing a spring in the handle of the

stiletto. And, with a lightning-like rapidity of gesture, he opened the vial of poison and carried it to his lips. "Farewell!" he murmured, "be happy." And he fell lifeless to the floor.

Fabien de Brouage no longer had a rival. The Coral Pin Association no longer had a leader.

XXVI.

THE PRINCE OF CATANZARO had voluntarily renounced his life. Marcas had died blaspheming. Cecilia was a widow. Octavie was free.

Cecilia had succeeded in reaching England, and Fabien de Brouage had gone to join her there after handing the grandmaster's papers to Lormier. Octavie had learned through the newspapers the fate of the Chevalier de Saint-Hélier, and the unfortunate Loquetières. Fatality had deprived her at one and the same time of her father, her would-be husband, and her lover, and that at the very moment when the marquis escaped her. All that remained to the orphan was her beauty; but this treasure alone was worth all that was left her by the deceased director of the Dark Room.

Far sadder was the fate which an imprudent step, now bitterly regretted, had brought upon Antoinette de Brouage. The poor girl had not remained at the Ile d'Albe, but, following her cousin's advice, had gone to Rochefort in Jacques Arvert's carryall. She was to have repaired to Brouage without delay, and if she had arrived there that same day, events would have taken another turn, for she would have been in advance of Saint-Hélier, in his pedlar's dress, and of Loquetières disguised as an archæologist. Her presence at the farm would have caused the gold-seekers a great deal of trouble, and as all things in this world are more or less connected, the millions in the vault would not, perhaps, have been clapped into the state treasury.

A sudden indisposition befalling Miss Elizabeth Tufton, had caused the loss of the Carbonari's treasure, and the death of the two scamps who had tried to appropriate the gold. The sentimental governess's nerves could not stand much emotion. Scarcely had she reached the Grand Pasha Hotel ere she was seized with hysterics, which she tried to cure by swallowing an incalculable number of cupsful of tea. These, however, turned the attack into fever. Jacques then sent for Dr. Sanjon, and when the latter heard what was the matter, he declared that Wellington's countrywoman was not in a condition to proceed with her journey, and must rest. It was not possible to disregard his orders, and the result of the delay was that Mademoiselle de Brouage reached her cousin's estate at the end of the week following upon the catastrophe at the Oxen's Ford. Ex-grenadier Arvert, who took her to the farm, had heard of the loss of the barrels of gold, and he suspected that they had previously been stored in the vaults of the keep, but he kept his suspicions to himself. He had long known the Mornacs, who, like himself, were Knights of Liberty, and he would have regretted doing them any harm.

When he reached their house with the two women, and a letter from Count René de Brouage requesting the farmer to receive them, he found the father and the four sons very anxious and sad.

The baroness was no longer with them. In despair at having allowed herself to be deceived by the sham pedlar's trick, she had insisted upon going away, and the *Stromboli* having reappeared at the entrance of the

creek on the night after the disaster, she started off on Pierre Moëse's boat which succeeded in hailing the Carbonari craft, on board which she was readily received. Lormier had approved of her departure, and after telling the farmers to boldly deny everything if they were questioned, he hastily returned to Paris to report to the high *venta* the unfortunate occurrence which would for a long time defer all attempts on the part of the Carbonari. The Mornacs had not been disturbed. The inquiry was not carried far, as the authorities did not wish that the affair should be noised abroad. Some of the assistants and the carters who had taken part in the expedition had been drowned, and others had sailed to the English coast in the smack chartered by Loquetières. It might thus be hoped that matters would remain as they were, and that there would be no suspicion as to the hiding-place where the gold had been concealed.

However, the farmer and his sons were not yet at ease, and they felt displeased at being obliged to receive Mademoiselle de Brouage. Jacques Arvert had acquainted them with the position of affairs, and they knew that Count René would come to join his cousin, and he was a master whom they had no sympathy for. His brother Fabien, whose views were the same as theirs, did not send them any further orders however, and they dared not trust to the post to ask for any. They were therefore obliged to do as the count ordered, and to wait till he himself arrived, which would now soon take place, as he was swiftly recovering; however, the reception of Mademoiselle de Brouage was neither cordial nor hospitable.

The coldness shown to her added to her sorrows. Her sensitive and excitable nature suffered at finding that the persons about her were unfriendly, and the companionship of Miss Tufton did not in the least console her. It must be admitted that the incidents of the journey, coupled with illness, had soured the Englishwoman's temper. She complained of everything; of the rustic manners of the farmers, the dampness of the climate, the strength of the wind, and many other things. Besides all this, she paid little heed to the sadness of her pupil, and persisted in declaring that her escapade would end in marriage. She affirmed in the most emphatic manner that the general would forgive his daughter as soon as he received a letter from her.

Antoinette was not so confiding, but she made haste to write to her father to ask his pardon, and then awaited the reply which would decide her fate. Her illusions had vanished, and her eyes were opened. She realised the gravity of her fault, and felt that for the daughter of the Marquis de Brouage there was no alternative but marriage with René or a convent life. She had resolved never to return to Paris if her father refused to consent to the marriage; and as there was a sisterhood at Rochefort, an Ursuline convent, the mother superior of which was the aunt of one of her most intimate friends, she determined to throw herself at the feet of this venerable lady, and ask her as a favour to receive her.

In those days it required nearly a week to receive at Brouage a reply to a letter sent to Paris. A week went by, and nothing coming, Antoinette began to despair. On the tenth day, however, the postman brought a short letter from René, which announced that he was entirely cured, and would arrive on the morrow at the farm, where he should remain but a few hours. He wished to proceed to Paris to explain in person to his uncle the fatality which had done so much harm, and ask him openly to allow him to repair that harm by marrying Mademoiselle de Brouage.

Antoinette's heart beat fast at the thought of seeing the lover of her

choice, who now so fully returned her affection. Miss Elizabeth, when told of the coming of the count, declared that she should be present at the interview—this was her usual way—and that she should encourage René in his laudable intention of making but a short visit. Antoinette let her talk, and promised herself that she would do as she pleased. Experience had taught her the value of her companion's intervention, and she wished to see her cousin alone, as it might be the last time.

This is why, on the morrow, leaving Elizabeth absorbed in the perusal of a novel which she had brought in her trunk, Antoinette repaired at an early hour to the sandhills near the keep. She had concluded that René would sleep at Rochefort and start early for the farm. From the spot where she posted herself she could see the road by which he would come. She intended to wait for him there, and speak with him in presence of Jacques Arvert and Doctor Saujon, for she hoped they would accompany their patient.

She soon saw an open carriage drawn by two horses, coming slowly along the road. "It is he," she murmured, and she waited with agitation for the carriage to come up.

It must necessarily pass along the dyke, which the waggons laden with the gold had crossed, and near which she now stood. Antoinette soon saw, however, that the carriage was driven by a coachman in livery, with a silver band round his hat.

"That is strange!" thought the young girl.

It was strange indeed that René should drive up in so conspicuous a vehicle, instead of contenting himself with the plain carryall, belonging to the old trooper of the Ile d'Albe. But this could only be he, for carriages seldom passed over that bad road, which did not lead to any important village. In ten minutes or so, the vehicle emerged from a ravine, where it had been lost to view for a moment, and appeared at about twenty paces from the spot where Antoinette was standing; and she then knew what to think of the coachman.

The driver with the band upon his hat was a gendarme, and seeing a woman on the dyke, he turned to speak to the persons in the vehicle. Astonished and almost terrified, Mademoiselle de Brouage greatly regretted having left the farm, but she did not think of flying, although she foresaw a danger. To leave the spot would only attract the attention of the persons in the carriage, and arouse their mistrust.

She let them come up, and was not a little troubled at seeing the carriage stop at a few steps from her and the door open. From it two soldiers alighted, then an officer of gendarmes, and then a man in civilian attire, who seemed to be a prefect or a commissary. The young girl understood only too well who these men were, and had the courage to wait for them quietly. The civilian functionary came towards her, and looked at her with a fixedness that was scarcely polite. As much shocked as agitated, she was about to turn her back upon him when he asked: "Are we far from the farm of Brouage?"

"It is over there," replied Antoinette, pointing to the red-tiled roof, and the tall trees surrounding it.

However, the man, instead of looking in the direction indicated, continued staring, and resumed the same rough tone: "You are from the farm, are you not?"

"I have been there for the last few days," stammered Mademoiselle de Brouage, whom these rude proceedings were beginning to disconcert.

"You mean for the last few months. Did you come alone?"

"No, sir; with another person."

"Indeed! Will you take us there? We will go on foot. My carriage could not reach the place through the salt marshes."

"You can go there without me," replied the young girl, indignantly.

"The road is easy, and I am not at your orders."

"Aha! you object, do you?" sneered the official. "I warn you that it is of no use, for we know perfectly well who you are."

Mademoiselle de Brouage turned pale. She thought that these men had been sent to arrest her.

"Yes, yes, we know that you were formerly called the Baroness de Casanova."

At this name, which she heard for the first time in her life, Mademoiselle de Brouage took courage. "You are mistaken, sir," said she quietly.

"Very well, very well," said the functionary. "Anybody can deny when in a bad scrape, and yours is very bad—very bad indeed!"

These remarks were interrupted by the officer of gendarmes, who approached the leader of the expedition, and said in his ear: "I must remark that the description of the baroness, or so-called baroness, does not in the least tally with the appearance of this young person."

"Indeed!" said the functionary, somewhat surprised.

"I am sure of it. The baroness is forty, so our information sets forth; she is dark and stout. This lady is a blonde and slender, and cannot yet be of age."

"True, it isn't the same, but no matter, my instructions are precise. There are two female accomplices of the Carbonari at the farm of Brouage. One is middle-aged, the other young. This one says that she came with another person, and that other must be the baroness. We now have before us the pretended niece of that sham Baroness de Casanova, the woman called Stella Negroni."

The officer consulted his notes, and said, in the dubious tone of an inferior who is afraid to contradict his chief: "Excuse me, commissary. True, La Negroni is young, but she has very black hair, and a very pale complexion, and this young lady is no more like her than day is like night."

The commissary—for it was a commissary sent expressly from Paris to make fresh inquiries about the origin of the millions fished up in the Oxen's Ford—now lost countenance. He was one of those who believe that a government agent cannot make a mistake. "This young lady, if she be a young lady, is in the wrong," said he after a moment's thought. "We will arrest her for the present, and proceed with her to the farm, where we will arrest the other woman also. They can explain themselves later on."

And the equitable functionary made an expressive sign to the gendarmes who had so placed themselves as to prevent the retreat of the inculpated party. For Antoinette de Brouage was now inculpated. She plainly realised this, and never had she felt the full extent of the error she had committed till now, or better understood that in listening to what Miss Tufton called "the voice of the heart," a young girl exposes herself to some very sad mishaps. While the sole heiress of a noble peer was thus being subjected to the humiliation of arrest, the feather-brained Englishwoman who had been the cause of her leaving home, was quietly eating bread and butter at the farm, and pouring tea and milk into a bowl, congratulating herself more than ever upon the excellent advice which she had given her

pupil. If Besty could have guessed that the police of the realm were coming to arrest her, she would have died of indigestion at once, although nature while giving her a tender heart had also provided her with a good stomach.

Pale, and as bewildered as though she had been guilty, poor Antoinette asked herself in terror what the officers were going to do with her, and prayed Heaven to send her a defender. Her eyes scoured the plain between the sandhills and the Charente for some horseman who might appear, riding at full gallop, as in the story of Blue Beard. But "Sister Anne" merely saw the sun shining, the green grass and the flying dust; whereas Antoinette perceived at a hundred paces from the dyke an open carriage coming rapidly up at full speed, drawn by four sturdy post horses.

The noise made by this equipage startled the commissary. He thought that such a carriage must bring some important personage—for instance, the Viscount de Rosily, the under-prefect of Rochefort, or M. Pepin de Belisle, the prefect of the Charente-Inferieure, and he thought it best to submit the matter in hand to him before taking any decisive measures with regard to the young person under suspicion. Fresh instructions might have been sent from Paris, for the government attached great importance to ascertaining the facts. So the delegate of the minister of police now said a few words to the officer, and both turned toward the vehicle which was now coming up. Mademoiselle de Brouage augured nothing good from this incident, for she did not believe that it could be her cousin arriving with so much bustle. But her astonishment equalled her joy when she saw the chaise stop and René alight from it.

It was, indeed, René, but he was not alone. After him a tall man stepped out of the carriage, a man whom Antoinette recognised at once. "My father!" she cried.

Her strength gave way, and she would have fallen, had not the officer of gendarmes, who prided himself upon being gallant, even in the exercise of his functions, sustained her with his strong arm.

Meantime, the Marquis de Brouage came forward with a military stride, and his imposing appearance made a lively impression upon the representative of the law. The commissary had never seen him, but the officer had formerly served under his command, and the face of the former colonel of the 9th Dragoons was not one to be forgotten. He warned the civil functionary in a whisper, and the latter was not a man to fail in respect towards a lieutenant general, still less to a peer of France, so they both went towards the marquis, hat in hand. Antoinette, more dead than alive, did not dare to stir. And, in truth, the punishment which she was at this moment enduring, was as cruel as it was unforeseen. She would have preferred any other chastisement to the humiliation of being seen by an offended father with a gendarme on each side of her.

However, M. de Brouage did not look at the culprit. He did not seem to see her. But René, who followed him, did not take his eyes off her, and the trembling girl could read hope and encouragement on his face. "What is all this, gentlemen?" asked the general, haughtily.

"Monseigneur," said the commissary, respectfully, "I have been sent by his excellency, the minister of police, to arrest two women who belong to the Carbonari plot just discovered, and I already have one of them here." He pointed, as he spoke, to his prisoner.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" asked the general, frowning. "By what right have you arrested Mademoiselle de Brouage?"

"Mademoiselle de Brouage!" exclaimed the delegate, in consternation.
 "What! is this person—"

"She is my daughter, sir, and I consider it very extraordinary that such a mistake should have been made."

"Excuse me, monseigneur. I had been told that two Italian women were at the farm, and I could not suppose that Mademoiselle de Brouage would be there alone."

"My daughter came here with her governess, let me inform you. And it suits me also to inform you that I have come here to give her in marriage to my nephew, Count René de Brouage, whom you see here."

The commissary, overwhelmed with surprise, could not find a word to reply, but Antoinette uttered a cry which clearly proved the state of her mind. She had heard everything, and made a motion as though anxious to throw herself in her father's arms. But a glance from M. de Brouage stopped her. She understood this look in which there was more tenderness than severity. It meant: "I do not wish that these people should understand that I am forgiving you."

And the marquis resumed, turning his back upon the unlucky commissary and talking to the officer of gendarmes: "Captain, I excuse you. A soldier is not a policeman, and may be mistaken when he is given other work than what suits him. I do justice to your zeal, but I advise you to return at once to Rochefort. Your mission is over. I take upon myself to put an end to it. The King has authorized me to do so."

This was said in such a manner that the officer and the envoy-extraordinary abstained from insisting, and returned with their escort to the vehicle waiting for them. At that time no resistance was ever offered to the orders of the King when delivered by a peer of the realm.

The scene which followed their departure was one of those which cannot be described. Antoinette in tears, René overcome with joy, the marquis greatly affected, formed a picture which would have driven all the painters and novel-writers in the world to despair.

"You have now two sons," Fabien had said to his uncle after avenging the death of his cousin Henri; and the marquis, saved from the Carbonari, and cured of his passion for Octavie, had forgiven Fabien's brother. He had started for the hamlet of the Ile d'Albe, where he expected to find his daughter, but he there only found his nephew, who did not require much urging to follow him to Brouage. It was written that the valiant head of the illustrious house of Brouage should affiance Antoinette to René, at the foot of the keep erected by his ancestors. The marriage took place at the beginning of the autumn, and Miss Elizabeth Tufton did not have the pleasure of attending it. By the general's orders she had returned to England, that country so favourable to love matches.

Fabien was not present either. It required three years for his uncle to obtain permission for him to return to France. When he did return, Cecilia d'Ascoli, the widow of the Prince of Catanzaro, was Viscountess de Brouage, and there was no more Carbonarism except such as abided in the memory of some obstinate conspirators. After the death of the grandmaster of the Coral Pin Brotherhood, there had remained merely some ambitious men at the head of the plotting, with a few cowardly *intriguants*. The latter well knew how to conceal themselves when the imprudent men whom they urged on to insurrection, heroically met death. On the 21st of September, 1822, four sergeants of the 45th of the Line, which counted in its ranks so many Carbonari that it had been sent from Paris to garrison La Rochelle,

died on the scaffold. Eight years later, the legitimate monarchy was overthrown, and the greater part of the members of the supreme *venta* shared among themselves the highest offices under the new government. One of them became prime minister.

Colonel Fournès won his epaulets as a general in the revolution of July. Lormier, however, was killed in the cloisters of Saint-Merry, in 1822, by some national guards, commanded by Boulardot, who had been recently made a captain and a chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

When the old regicide fell under the fire, Fabien no longer placed any faith in the doctrines which this earnest master of socialism had preached to him. Fabien still loved liberty, but his attachment to it had become purely platonical. Revolutionists had disgusted him with revolution. He only adored Cecilia, who lived for him alone, for Heaven had refused her the joys of maternity, and her only friend, Francesca Ranese, had not long survived Orso. The frightful climate of London had killed her.

The general was fortunate enough not to behold the events of 1830. He died standing and in full uniform, for he was stricken with apoplexy on leaving the coronation ceremony of Charles X., and he died happy, for the King had promised that his peerage should be transmitted to the grandson whom his daughter had just given him. He did not foresee that the triumphant middle classes would abolish the hereditary peerage, and that the last scion of his race would never sit in the Upper Chamber.

On the other hand, through a strange freak of fate, the golden-haired beauty realized, in middle age, the dream of her stormy youth. Octavie, though repelled by a great lord, found a rich cloth manufacturer who married her for better or worse, and who, thanks to her intrigues, became a deputy under the monarchy of July, and then a peer of France "for life" like so many others. Thus it was that Mademoiselle de Saint-Hélier died a peeress.

All roads lead to Rome.

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